



## More Than Words by harringtons

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**Summary:** Steve Harrington never thought he'd love someone again the way he loved Nancy Wheeler. Daisy Henderson was just trying to adjust to all the changes going on in her life. The two of them certainly never saw the other one coming.

# 1. Chapter 1

A/N: Hello there, readers! Thank you so much for checking out my story! I've had this fic idea floating around in my head for a little while now since finishing *Stranger Things 2*, and now I'm finally putting it into words. This is my first time writing fanfiction, so please feel free to let me know how I can do better, what you like or don't like, etc. Constructive criticism helps! Anyway, thank you again for giving this story a read! Hope you enjoy!

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Daisy Henderson was forced to grow up a lot sooner than most other girls her age. At just seventeen, she was mature beyond her years. She'd spent most of her adolescence looking after her younger brother, Dustin, after their father walked out them. Their mother had always been a bit unreliable, and that was putting it nicely. It often felt as though they were in the care of a lackadaisical babysitter instead of an actual parent. So, Daisy took it upon herself to assume that responsibility.

She and Dustin were always close for brother and sister, especially considering their age difference. Although Daisy had never been one to be very interested in science fiction, or play Dungeons and Dragons, or really immerse herself such interests, she'd always find herself listening to Dustin go on and on about these things, and the games he'd play with his friends. It left a smile on her face to hear how enthusiastically he'd talk about those things. And it made her even happier that he actually *wanted* to include her in his interests. She too would let him in on the going-on's of her life, and she appreciated having someone to talk to about her days, even if he wasn't always one hundred percent interested in her stories.

Daisy had always been extremely protective over her brother. She knew the way other kids treated him, how they made fun of the way he talked or the fact that he still didn't have his adult teeth yet. Most of the time it was recollections of what the other kids had said that Dustin would tell her, but there had been quite a few times she'd actually reprimanded kids if she was in the presence of their

taunting. It was something she would *never* let slide, if she could help it.

Up until this year, Daisy had attended a private high school in Hawkins. Unfortunately, her mother no longer had the money to afford the tuition, and so Daisy was forced to transfer to Hawkins High School this year. She hated that she couldn't just finish out her senior year at her old school with the friends she'd made over the years, but funds were limited and she knew she had no other choice.

It'd been a month now since the start of the school year, and Daisy still found it hard to adjust. All of her classmates had known each other for years, been through all of high school's ups and downs together, and she was realizing it was difficult to fit into these already solid groups of friends. She'd made a couple friends with some girls in her classes, but the relationships were very superficial. They'd gossip about boys and clothes and music, and Daisy would interject sometimes, but she really hadn't formed a true connection to anyone at the school so far.

However, there were just a couple people she'd known outside of school for a few years now; Jonathan Byers and Nancy Wheeler. They were really only acquainted with each other because their younger brothers were so close. Daisy had only ever met Nancy a handful of times, and the two of them never truly became friends. Even now, going to the same school, Daisy felt like she hardly knew Nancy. They'd pass each other in the halls and smile at one another, and that was about it. Jonathan was also a rather hard one for Daisy to get to know. He was usually very closed off, but sometimes they'd share the occasional small talk if they were both at the same place picking up their brothers.

She would never say that she was *miserable* at Hawkins, but Daisy sure felt like the odd girl out most of the time. She just had to keep reminding herself that it was just this one last school year to make it through, and she would be out of there.

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Daisy sat cross-legged on her bed, her science text book open in front of her as she scribbled down notes on a piece of lined paper. There was a big test coming up and while she felt *fairly* prepared for it,

there was nothing wrong with a little extra diligence. Besides, it wasn't like she had anything else to do that night. All of her "friends" were probably out with their significant others (or flavors of the week) and Daisy felt like studying was more appropriate on a Thursday night. She took her school work seriously, more so than a lot of the other kids at school, because she knew good grades were a big factor in getting into a good college.

With her bedroom door cracked slightly open, she could hear her brother's grumbles from the living room. "*Shit...* Shit! Shit!" Dustin could be heard from the other room, and Daisy only shook her head. "Son of a bitch!"

"Dusty... *language*." She heard her mother scold (or what was an attempt at scolding) with very little effort. With a sigh, Daisy stood from her bed and made her way into the living room to see what was going on.

"You almost hit Mews!" Her mother's voice became louder as Daisy entered the room, leaning against the threshold to watch the scene unfold in front of her.

"Can I *please* check under your cushion?" Dustin nearly begged, placing the couch cushion back where it belonged haphazardly. Her mother whined, and then Dustin whined, and Daisy fought hard not to roll her eyes. It was like watching two children arguing, and Daisy finally pinched the bridge of her nose, stepping forward.

"Dustin, I've got quarters in my room. But you *have* to pay me back this time, okay?" She spoke up, watching her younger brother's eyes light up as he stood from his spot on the floor in front of their mother's chair. She knew he and the boys scrounged up quarters every week to go play at the arcade, and every time, Dustin would rush around the house at the last minute trying to collect his "haul." The arcade was one of the newest, most popular spots for the kids and Dustin was *very* proud of being the top scorer on a majority of the games. He made sure to tell Daisy all about it every time he'd come home.

"Thank you, Daisy! You're the best! I *promise* this time, really." He nearly ran past her and into her room, pulling her purse off the night

stand and grabbing as many quarters as he could hold. Daisy merely cast an amused smile as she watched, stopping him before he could rush back out of her room. Her face turned a bit more serious now.

"Hey, you call me if you need a ride home later, okay? Or ask Mrs. Byers for a ride back to her house and I'll pick you up there." She said sternly, only earning an exasperated huff from Dustin as he nodded his head. Deep down, she knew he appreciated her concern, though... or so she hoped.

"Yeah, I know, I know. I gotta go. See you later!" He waved after stuffing the quarters in the pocket of his sweatshirt, running out the front door without another word. Daisy shook her head once more as she returned to her bedroom, sitting back down on her bed.

Ever since last year, and what happened to Will Byers, Daisy always made sure Dustin always knew to call her for rides if he needed them. She knew he'd rather ride his bike, but she worried, especially at night. She tried to be the least over-bearing she could, but sometimes that proved difficult.

Daisy didn't know what happened to Will—the *real* story—until after it was all over. She had been just as oblivious as her mother and all the other parents (besides Joyce) to what was really going on at the time. But Dustin had told her about it – everything, down to the very last detail. He wasn't supposed to tell her, but there were no secrets between the two of them. For the most part, they told each other everything. And Daisy swore never to speak of it to anyone else, knowing the repercussions they'd *both* face if those men ever found out. So she pretended that all she knew was the same thing everyone else in town knew; that Will got lost in the woods for a week.

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Daisy had given up on studying by the time Dustin returned home. The television in her room was playing on some random channel that she truly wasn't paying much attention to. When she heard Dustin walking past her bedroom, she called out to him, smiling when he poked his head in her doorway.

"How was the arcade?" She asked. Usually he'd barge right into her room and tell her all about it. Tonight, he just looked angry.

"You won't believe it. Some kid beat my score on Centipede *and* Dig Dug! I was number one on those for *weeks*. And *of course*, that weirdo Keith wouldn't tell us who the kid was. *MadMax*. What kind of name is MadMax anyway? Probably some nerd who doesn't want to use his real name so no one finds out who he is."

Daisy raised her eyebrows as Dustin reiterated the story at the speed of light. She frowned along with him as he told her, but then offered him a sympathetic smile. "I'm sorry, bud. Just keep at it, I'm sure you can beat this guy's score eventually." She suggested, but that did nothing to ease her brother's frustrations.

"Why don't you go on and get ready for bed, yeah? There's school tomorrow." She stood up from her bed and ushered him out of the room, watching as he mumbled under his breath something about this MadMax person, begrudgingly walking down the hallway and into his own room.

Daisy only laughed softly to herself, turning back around and closing her bedroom door. There was definitely never a dull moment with that kid. She crawled into bed after turning the light off, silently staring up at the dark ceiling for a few minutes. Convincing herself that tomorrow was going to be a good day at school was becoming somewhat of a nightly routine for her. She didn't *hate* Hawkins High School, but she most certainly missed her old friends. It would certainly make it easier to get through the rest of the school year if she had people she actually *liked* to hang around with.

Sighing, Daisy finally rolled over onto her side and made herself comfortable before closing her eyes, eager to get some much needed sleep.

## 2. Chapter 2

A/N: Hello again, readers! Wow, all I can say is *thank you* to everyone who has already favorited, followed, and reviewed! It's honestly so cool to see some feedback already, after only posting Chapter 1 a couple days ago! I'm really excited to share this story with you guys, so without further ado, here's Chapter 2. Enjoy!

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Daisy stared down at the orange slip of paper in her hands, reading and then re-reading the big, dark text that lined it.

**"YOU'RE INVITED! COME GET SHEET FACED!"**

The top of the paper read, with an address listed underneath. One of the more popular girls in school, Tina, apparently threw this huge Halloween bash at her house every year. At least that's what one of the girls Daisy was friends with, Lisa, had told her. And it was an *honor* to be invited, according to her. Quite honestly, Daisy was surprised she had received an invitation. For the few short months she'd been at Hawkins High School so far, she mostly kept a low profile.

"So, you're coming, *right*?" Lisa pried, as she linked arms with Daisy and walked down the hallway. Daisy was hesitant to answer, which Lisa quickly picked up on, and gave her a very over-dramatic pout.

"Come on, Daisy. It's so much fun! I've gone every year since I was a freshman. It's honestly a can't-miss party." The petite blonde-haired girl continued to coax, a hopeful look adorning her features. "There's music, costumes, boys... *booze*." She added, wiggling her eyebrows at Daisy.

Daisy laughed softly at her friend. She'd been to one or two high school parties at her old school, and truthfully, she so far had been unimpressed. Sure, they were fun. And the thrill of underage drinking was too much to resist. But the parties typically always ended in fist fights or the cops being called for music that's playing too loud. Was that all *really* worth a few hours of fun?



"I'll think about it." Daisy finally answered. She could tell Lisa didn't like that answer, and she prepared herself for the coercing to continue. And it did.

"Look, Daisy. You're still pretty new here. Not many of the other kids even *realize* you're a student here now... no offense. This'll be a great way to get to know everyone." At Daisy's uneasy look, Lisa continued, offering her a smile. "Listen, if it totally blows, we'll leave. But at least give it *try*. For me... and you. But mostly me." She teased.

"Alright, alright. *Fine*. I'll go." Daisy gave in, knowing this wasn't going to be a battle that she was going to win. Lisa's face lit up and she nearly jumped up and down in excitement. Daisy fought hard not to laugh, but an amused smile did pull at the corners of her lips. "But I'm holding you to that, you know. If it sucks, we're leaving."

"Deal." Lisa responded quickly, unlatching her arm from Daisy's as she stopped at the classroom on her left. "But it won't suck, I promise. I'll call you tonight so we can talk about costumes!" Lisa grinned, giving one final wave to Daisy before disappearing into the classroom. Daisy just shook her head. It couldn't be *too* bad, could it? And maybe Lisa was right... as much as Daisy didn't want to admit it. She *was* still new here, and other than the very small group of friends she had, she hardly knew anyone else at the school. A little branching out certainly wouldn't be a bad thing for her.

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Halloween night came up a bit too quickly for Daisy's liking. She wasn't regretting her decision about going to the party, but for some reason she just couldn't calm her nerves. She was thinking entirely too much about it. What if she got too drunk and made a fool of herself? What if, for the remainder of the school year, she was the laughing stock of the whole school? What if nobody *liked* her?

She didn't understand why she was having these fears *now*. She'd been at the school for two months now, and was perfectly content being more of a wallflower. But it was far too late to call Lisa and bail on her. Besides, their costume—the twins from *The Shining*—wouldn't really work if she didn't show up.

Taking a deep, calming breath, Daisy stared at herself in the mirror.

Her long, brown hair spilled over her shoulders in loose, child-like curls. She was finishing up the last touches on her make-up when there was a knock on her bedroom door. She was so tense, it nearly made her jump out of her skin.

"Come in." She called after clearing her throat, turning to see it was Dustin standing in her doorway. She couldn't help but smile, seeing him in his *Ghostbusters* costume he was so proud of.

"Lookin' good." She said, earning a cheeky grin from him. "You too." Dustin responded, coming into the room fully now and sitting down on the edge of her bed. He sat quietly for a minute or two, and Daisy was beginning to wonder if there was a reason he'd come in. Finally, he spoke up.

"How can you tell if a girl... likes you? You know, like... *likes* you. I mean, you're a girl, so... how do you treat a guy that you like?"

Daisy was completely caught off guard by his question. She wasn't even exactly sure how to answer it. He'd never come to her for this type of advice before. But then again, he was getting to be that age where these things were bound to come up.

"Uh... well, is there a girl at school that you like? Or is this more of just a general question?" Daisy asked, her eyebrows raising in curiosity. When Dustin's cheeks flushed a light shade of red, Daisy didn't even need for him to answer.

"There's this new girl at school, Max. Remember MadMax? Turns out that was actually *her*. She rides skateboards and plays video games... she's pretty awesome."

Daisy smiled. She'd never seen Dustin talk about a girl like that, let alone be interested in one enough to come and talk to her about it.

"Well, have you talked to her? How does she act around you?" She asked him. Dustin paused a minute in thought, shrugging his shoulders. "I think she tries to act like she's uninterested, or like she doesn't like us." He said, and Daisy was pretty sure "us" meant the rest of his friends.

"Do girls usually act like they don't like you when they really do? I heard that's a thing. They try to play hard to get... almost hit you with a car..." He trailed off, and Daisy held a hand up, widening her eyes.

"She *what*?"

"No, I mean—it wasn't *her*. She doesn't drive. It was her brother driving, I think. But maybe she told him to do it... you know, to make us all think she doesn't really like us."

"Dustin... I think girls at that age could absolutely pretend not to like you when they do. But if I were you, I'd stay *away* from the ones that have their brother try and hit you with his car, okay? That's just crazy." Daisy said, hoping Dustin was exaggerating just a little bit. He tended to do that sometimes. He sighed from his spot on the bed, standing up and walking back towards the door.

"Thanks, Daisy. I'll keep it in mind. Anyway, I'm going trick-or-treating with the guys. See you soon."

Daisy nodded, offering her brother a reassuring smile. "Yeah, see you soon. Have fun. And be *careful*. Watch out for cars."

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The party was in full effect when Daisy arrived with Lisa. Music was blaring from inside the house; teenagers littered the backyard and inside, drinking and shouting and laughing. Lisa wasn't lying when she said this party was a can't-miss. Just about the entire school was there, all crammed into one house like drunk, horny sardines.

"Drink!" Lisa nearly shoved a red solo cup into Daisy's hands, commanding her instead of asking her if she wanted one. Daisy glanced down at the reddish-purple liquid in the cup, arching an eyebrow as she looked back at Lisa. "What is it?"

"How should I know? It's *alcohol*. Don't be a baby, just have some." Lisa shouted over the music, taking a swig from her own cup, cringing as the liquid passed down her throat. Daisy watched in amusement before finally taking a sip. Her face scrunched up and she had a similar reaction to Lisa's. Whoever made the punch made it

*strong*. No wonder everyone was already drunk.

Within nearly a half-hour, Lisa was finishing her second drink while Daisy was still working on her first. There was some sort of commotion going on outside, boys chanting and yelling could be heard even over the music. Lisa had started talking to some random boy, and it didn't take them very long to sneak off somewhere more private.

Daisy suddenly felt very vulnerable, standing there on her own. She didn't have much time to think about, though, because the commotion had made its way inside now. Three very drunk boys came in, yelling something about a new "keg king." She could only assume it was the one in the middle, with the mullet and a smug smirk on his face.

Daisy brought her cup to her lips, looking frantically around the room for *anyone* she knew enough to go talk to. The last thing she wanted was for the newly crowned keg king and his friends to come over and cause trouble with her like they were doing with others.

Her dark eyes landed on a familiar face—albeit one that she was surprised to see here—and she smiled in relief. "Jonathan!" She called out, quickly swerving away from the punch bowl and over to where he was standing.

"Daisy, hey." He smiled in return, but Daisy could see that he was just as uncomfortable as she was with all that was going on around them. "How are you?" He asked her.

Daisy looked around the room briefly, seeing no sign of Lisa anymore, and she frowned slightly. "I'm... feeling a little bit out of my element here, to be honest." She answered, her gaze meeting Jonathan's again. He nodded in agreement, taking a second to survey the room as well. It seemed as though he was looking for someone, but she couldn't be sure.

"How's Will?" She asked, bringing Jonathan's attention back to her once again. His expression was somewhat unreadable, but he forced a smile. "He's doing good... better." Daisy could tell he didn't really want to go into too much detail about it, so she understood when he

changed the subject. "How are you liking it here so far? At school, I mean."

"It's fine," Daisy responded with a half-hearted smile. "I mean, yeah, I do miss my old school and friends. But I'm starting to get used to it over here. It's not so bad."

Jonathan opened his mouth to respond, but before her could, a taller figure with an unmistakeable head of hair stormed past them angrily, just about bumping right into Daisy. Her eyes followed the boy, eyebrows furrowing together, as she watched him brush past everyone else and out the front door.

She looked back over at Jonathan, and he shared the same look of confusion she had, but in his features she could also see the worry he felt. Now she was *totally* lost.

"Who was that?" She asked.

"Uh... that was Nancy's boyfriend." He answered, looking back in the direction the boy had come from before storming out. He turned back to Daisy, looking at her apologetically. "I'm sorry... I have to go find her."

"Oh–yeah, of course." She responded, and he was already out of sight before she could even get the words out.

With still no sign of Lisa, Daisy decided it was time to go. She had no interest in continuing to stand there by herself, and she was sure her friend would understand. Besides, Lisa was the one who ditched her anyway.

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Daisy was walking up the driveway the same time Dustin had returned from trick-or-treating. She gave a tired smile in greeting, motioning to the pillow case full of candy he was carrying.

"How was trick-or-treating?" She asked.

"*Awesome*. We hit the jackpot on the full-sized candy bars. How was your party?"

"Uneventful." Daisy said, waving her hand dismissively. "Sounds like you had a much better night than me."

Before either of them were able to get a word in, the trash can next to the house began rattling. Startled by the sudden movement, the two of them jumped. After a moment, it stopped, and it got eerily quiet. They waited in silence with baited breath, both staring at the trash can until it began rattling again, a strange screeching sound now coming from inside of it.

"What the—" Dustin started, taking a step towards the can. Daisy was right beside him, ready to pull him back.

"Dustin, *don't*." She hissed, reaching for his arm. "There could be a rabid animal in there for all we know."

He swatted her hand away, and the two of them slowly moved closer. "Mews?" Dustin called out, but there was no sign of the cat. Finally, he reached for the lid of the can, ignoring Daisy's protests, and lifted it off. The two of them carefully leaned over the opening, peering down inside. Daisy didn't know what she was expecting it to be, but it certainly wasn't that. The creature inside was something neither of them had ever seen before. With widened eyes, the two of them muttered in complete unison:

"Holy *shit*."

### 3. Chapter 3

A/N: Hello, readers! Sending out a *huge* thank you again to everyone who has followed, favorited, and reviewed! I'm so glad people are liking the story so far! I would like to apologize for the lack of Daisy/Steve interactions so far, but I'm going with the timeline from the show and wasn't planning on having them actually meet until the point in the show where Dustin and Steve meet up with each other. Besides, I've been enjoying writing scenes with Daisy and Dustin as well. But fear not, you will definitely be getting some Daisy and Steve in the next chapter, I promise!

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"What is that?" Daisy asked aloud, looking down at the slug-like creature that had made itself at home in their garbage can. But more importantly, she wondered, how did *get* in there? She had never seen anything like this before, and judging by the look on Dustin's face, neither had he. Dustin, however, seemed much more amazed with the mystery creature, while Daisy looked upon it in scared confusion.

When Dustin started to reach down into the can to pick the creature up, Daisy quickly swatted his shoulder, looking at him incredulously. "Don't touch it, Dustin!" She scolded, but her younger brother didn't seem to understand the potential danger. "It could be poisonous... or rabid, for all we know." She added in an attempt to get her point across, though it didn't do much to persuade him.

"Come on, Daisy, look at him. He's harmless." Dustin retorted, and before Daisy could do anything else about it, he leaned down to pick *whatever* it was up. "Hey there, little guy. Don't worry, I'm not going to hurt you." Dustin spoke in a quiet, soothing voice as if he was talking to a child or a puppy.

Daisy watched in horror – though she couldn't deny the curiosity that overcame her when Dustin held it at eye level. She got a closer look at it, and was still just as perplexed as she was a few minutes before. It resembled a slug, but it was much bigger and much more noisy than any regular slug. Plus, it had two front legs, which she knew that regular slugs didn't have. She had no real desire to touch it. It

appeared slimy and sticky, and Daisy was just fine with looking at it.

"He's kinda cute." Dustin smiled. Daisy raised her eyebrows, shaking her head. "Your definition of cute and my definition of cute must be two *very* different things, then." She responded. It was quiet for a few moments as the two of them stared at the little creature in Dustin's hands, until the faint voice of their mother could be heard from inside, snapping them both back into reality.

"What do we do with it?" Daisy asked, hoping that Dustin would just be content letting the thing go and hopefully it would make its way into someone else's garbage can. Unfortunately, much to her dismay, Dustin had already made up his mind that he was going to keep it. "Well we can't just let him go. We could have just discovered a *brand new* species. I'll keep him in my room." Dustin said, earning a sigh from Daisy. She knew there was no way to convince him otherwise. Once he made up his mind, that was it.

"You know if mom sees that... thing, she's going to freak out." Daisy said pointedly, motioning towards the front door where they could still hear their mother on the other side of it, talking to the cat. Dustin knew she was right; there was no way he'd be able to keep it if their mother were to see it. He quickly looked for something, *anything* to hide his new discovery in. Finally, his eyes landed on his make-shift proton pack from his costume. "Ah-hah!" He grinned, opening the box to put the little creature inside of it. "Just stay quiet for a few minutes, little guy."

"This is crazy, you know that, right?" Daisy looked over at Dustin, an unsure look crossing her features. Say this *was* some new found species; neither of them knew how to properly take care of it. What if it truly was poisonous? They had no idea what they were bringing into their home.

"Just back me up alright? Once we get past mom, we're in the clear." Dustin said as he closed the top to the proton pack. Daisy had a terrible feeling about this, but she was positive that Dustin wasn't going to listen to any of her reasoning. He was set on keeping it, and so nothing Daisy said was going to change that.

"Fine," She said, heading towards the front door, Dustin following



closely behind. "But you're taking care of it."

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The next day at school, Daisy couldn't stop thinking about that strange creature. Dustin had decided on calling him Dart, and he made her promise not to tell anyone else about him. Something about scientific discoveries and not wanting anyone else taking credit. Daisy was more worried about the thing being left unattended at their house while the two of them were at school. Little did she know that Dustin had secretly brought Dart to school along with him that day.

While Daisy took most of her classes seriously, gym class was the only one that she truly didn't care much for. It was typically her last class of the day, and by that time the boy's basketball team took it upon themselves to start their practice. And since the coach was also the gym teacher, he usually just let it happen. Daisy had no qualms about it though, she would much rather sit on the bleachers and observe than do anything remotely athletic and risk making a fool of herself.

She had her face buried in her math text book, scribbling out practice problems in her notebook that was balancing on her knee. It was the perfect time to get some extra study time in. Her grades were *okay* in math, but there was definitely room for improvement. It was just one of those subjects that didn't come as easily to her as the others did.

Her concentration was interrupted when she heard a commotion out on the court. Her brown eyes lifted from her notebook to see two of the boys seemingly trash talking one another... one more so than the other. One of them—the one with the mullet from the party the previous night—she now knew to be Billy Hargrove. He was a new student here as well, but unlike Daisy, he made his presence much more known than hers. And from the looks of it right now, he was the one doing the trash talking.

Daisy was unsure of the other one's name, but she *did* recognize him as well. He was the one who had stormed past her at the party. Nancy's boyfriend, she remembered Jonathan telling her. Although that could have changed, if his anger from the other night was any indication of their relationship status. Daisy was pulled from her

thoughts once again, flinching as she watched the boy she currently only knew as "Nancy's boyfriend" get shoved to the ground by Billy.

It was then that her eyes met Billy's—unintentionally on her part—and their gazes locked for what seemed like an eternity, but in reality was only a few short seconds. He smirked, sending a wink in her direction, and Daisy immediately averted her gaze. Her cheeks turned a violent shade of red as she looked back down at her notebook, hoping beyond hope that he hadn't just witnessed that. Chancing one last final glance to be sure, she lifted her eyes slowly. His eyes were still on her and that smug-looking smirk was still on his face.

Daisy quickly looked away again, vigorously closing her text book and her notebook and shoving them into her bag just in time for the bell to ring. No sooner did it sound than Daisy was nearly scrambling out of the gymnasium, making a mental note to stay *away* from that Billy Hargrove. He seemed like nothing but trouble for someone like her. One thing she did notice, though, in her mad rush out of there was that Nancy's boyfriend was nowhere to be seen.

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Daisy returned home not too shortly after school ended, surprised not to see Dustin's bike parked out front. Usually he was home before she was, unless he went over one of his friends' houses or stayed after school for AV Club. Not thinking too much about it, Daisy walked into the house, giving a smile and a wave to her mother sitting on the couch, Mews in her lap.

"Hi, sweetie. How was school?" Her mother asked, to which Daisy simply shrugged dismissively. "It was fine. Has Dustin been home yet?"

"I haven't seen him." Her mother shook her head. Daisy briefly wondered about her and Dustin's discovery from last night. She could only assume that their mother hadn't seen it, or else she probably would have freaked out the second one of them returned home. Without another word, Daisy made her way down the hallway, slowly pushing open the door to Dustin's bedroom. She knew he had put Dart in his turtle's tank the night before, but when she leaned over to look inside it, it was empty. "Shit." She muttered.

Either Dustin had taken the thing to school with him, or it had escaped and now it was somewhere in the house. Neither scenario was a favorable one and she wished that they (or Dustin, really) hadn't decided on bringing Dart inside in the first place. When she heard the front door open and close from down the hallway, Daisy knew it had to be Dustin, so she waited there until he came into his room.

"Please tell me you have that thing with you?" Daisy looked at him pointedly as he walked in, making sure to speak in a hushed tone so that their mother wouldn't overhear. Daisy doubted she would, though, she was too busy watching television. "He has a name, you know." Dustin said defensively, reaching into his backpack to pull Dart out. Daisy's eyes widened at the sight – Dart was about three times bigger than he was the night before, and he'd miraculously sprouted two new back legs.

"What the–"

"I know." Dustin interrupted, placing Dart back into the tank. "He keeps molting. Pretty cool, right?" He added, staring at Dart as if he were a proud parent. Daisy looked uncertain. If he had grown that much in just *one* day... how big was he supposed to get? They had no idea what they were getting themselves into with this creature.

"I really think we need to turn him over to someone, Dustin. Like... animal control, or something." Daisy suggested. The look of pure insult on Dustin's face told her that her idea was *not* going to happen. "No way. They'll kill him, Daisy. Besides, Dart and I have bonded, okay? I don't know why no one else *trusts* me about this."

Daisy's face softened a bit. She knew her brother, and she knew when something was wrong. "Hey... I'm sorry, okay? I just don't know if we can... properly care for Dart if we don't even know what he is." She tried explaining herself. Dustin sighed, plopping down on his bed and Daisy followed suit, sitting down beside him. "Everything okay?"

Dustin shrugged. "The guys think that Dart's from the Upside Down and they want to get rid of him. They don't understand that he's harmless, you know? They think I'm stupid for wanting to keep him."

Daisy sighed, placing a hand on Dustin's shoulder. "Well, you're not stupid. Maybe they were all just a little freaked out too. I mean, I don't think anyone's ever seen anything like Dart before. I'm sure they're just looking out for you, and maybe they're just... showing it in the wrong way."

She wondered, briefly, about this Upside Down. She knew it was the place where Will had been trapped last year, Dustin had told her about it. And if Dart *had* really come from there... could that mean that more creatures from this place could make their way into their world?

"Yeah, well... just don't mention to the guys if you see them that I still have Dart, okay? They think he's still lost at school." Dustin said, looking over to her with a hopeful look on his face.

"Wait a minute... he got *lost* at school?" Daisy asked. Dustin waved his hand dismissively as though it was no big deal. "For like, ten minutes, tops. I found him and he's back here now, so it's fine." He motioned over towards the tank where Dart was eating some of his Halloween candy.

Daisy just shook her head. "I won't say anything. But you shouldn't lie to your friends. And from now on, no more bringing him to school. He should be fine in there while you're gone."

"Okay, okay. I know." Dustin said. Daisy stood up from her spot on the bed and she smiled as she ruffled his curly hair with her hand, earning an annoyed groan from him as he swatted her hand away.

"Glad we're on the same page." She spoke, walking over towards the door. "Anyway, I've got homework. I'll be in my room if you need me." She added, about to step out of his room before she heard him call out to her.

"Hey, Daisy? Thanks." Dustin said.

"For what?" She asked, quirked an eyebrow.

"Just for being an awesome sister... and not making me get rid of Dart."

Daisy felt a smile tugging at the corners of her lips. "You're welcome, Dustin. You're a pretty awesome brother yourself."

## 4. Chapter 4

**A/N: Welcome back, readers! I believe this is my longest chapter yet, I can't wait to share it with you all! And, finally, we've got the Daisy and Steve interactions I'm sure you've all been waiting for! As always, thank you very much to all who have favorited, followed, and reviewed. Enjoy!**

---

Daisy had dozed off nearly the second she made contact with her bed after getting home from school. She didn't really know why she was so tired, but then again, it had been somewhat of a stressful week. Thankfully, now she had the weekend to recuperate. She hadn't been asleep for very long when she was jolted awake by someone shaking her shoulders vigorously.

"Daisy! Daisy, wake up *now!*" She vaguely recognized the voice to be Dustin's, but she shot up, eyes wide and awake when she realized the distress in his tone.

"We have a big problem." He said, eyes just as wide.

He didn't wait for her to respond as he turned on his heel and made his way out of her room, expecting that she'd follow. And follow she did. Daisy was out of her bed in an instant, following him to his room. She had a sneaking suspicion that this "big problem" had something to do with Dart. She felt her stomach drop at the thought. What could have possibly happened in 24 hours?

"Now... don't freak out. And keep quiet. Mom *can't* know about this." Dustin instructed, but his words only made her do the exact opposite. She was *already* freaking out. "What happened?" She cautiously asked.

Dustin didn't answer, he simply pointed over towards the wall in the corner of his room. Furrowing her eyebrows in confusion, Daisy looked at him. "I don't--"

"Behind the chair." He said. It was then that Daisy even noticed the chair, and more importantly, what was *on* it. It was covered in blood

and scratch marks, and Daisy could have sworn her heart dropped into her stomach at that moment. Slowly, she stepped towards the chair, peeking over the back of it when she got close enough.

"*Oh my God.*" She gasped, her hand coming up to cover her mouth. She suddenly felt nauseous. Lying on the floor behind the chair was a *very* dead Mews. Something had clearly made the cat its main course for dinner, and Daisy could only assume it had to have been Dart. Their mother was going to lose her mind.

"*Dart* did this?!" Daisy asked, turning back to look at Dustin. She couldn't look at the poor cat any longer. "How? He was only like *this* big yesterday!" She held her hands up to estimate the size. Dustin shushed her, glancing back at his door to make sure their mother wouldn't hear. She had already caught on to the cat being missing and the last thing they needed was for her to come in there because of all the commotion.

"Yeah, well, he grew again. And... I'm pretty sure he's a baby demogorgon." It took Daisy a few seconds to realize what he was talking about. She remembered him telling her about the demogorgon that had taken Will last year. But she thought he said it had been killed. Dustin averted eye contact with her, looking down at the floor. "I'm sorry, Daisy... I know we should have just let him go like you said. I didn't think he'd eat Mews." The last part was said in a hushed tone.

Daisy sighed, running a hand over her face. She knew she had a bad feeling about Dart from the beginning... but she couldn't make Dustin feel any worse about the situation than he already did. They were just going to have to figure it out. And to start... they were going to have to get rid of Mews' body and then *somehow* get rid of Dart.

Daisy paused, suddenly realizing something. "Where is Dart now?" She asked, looking around. The room was quiet save for the two of them. So if he wasn't in there... where did he go?

"He's... hiding. Somewhere. I think." Dustin responded, averting his eyes again when Daisy looked as though she was going to start panicking. "I scared him off when I found him in here."

"Dustin... this isn't good." Daisy said, running a nervous hand through her hair. Dustin nodded his head in agreement. "I know. But I have a plan."

---

Part one of their plan had been a success; getting their mother out of the house. Dustin had told her that someone had spotted Mews over in another neighborhood, and she promptly left to go help search. Daisy *did* feel bad, lying to her mother like that, but the truth of the situation would absolutely hurt her even more.

Part two of their plan was now commencing, while Daisy went into the refrigerator and pulled out all the bologna she could find. Dustin had instructed her to make a trail of it from his bedroom all the way outside to the storm cellar. Once Dart was actually *in* the storm cellar, she wasn't exactly sure what they were going to do. As of right now, she was just going with what Dustin said and hoping for the best.

"Almost ready?" Dustin called from inside. Daisy laid the last piece of bologna by the entrance of the cellar and began making her way back inside. When she saw Dustin clad in all of his hockey gear, she arched an eyebrow. "Why do *you* get all the padding?" She asked, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Because *I'm* the one that's gonna have to go after him if he doesn't take the bait." He said matter-of-factly, holding up the hockey stick he had in his hand for emphasis. "You're just going to be the look-out."

That didn't do much to ease her mind, but Daisy simply nodded her head anyway. Dustin turned, knocking a couple times on his bedroom door, where Dart was currently inside. "Dart? Breakfast time, buddy." He called, before motioning for Daisy to start heading outside. She didn't hesitate, and Dustin was right on her heels. The two scurried out of the house as quickly as they could and into the wooden shed outside.

Once they were in the shed, both of them peeked out through a slit in the wood panels, just waiting. Daisy held her breath, feeling her heart beating hard in her chest. When Dart finally emerged from the



house, Daisy almost had to do a double-take. Dustin was right; he *had* grown. And he looked much more dangerous than he did just a couple of days ago.

So far, so good; he seemed to be following the bologna trail just fine... until he got to the entrance of the storm cellar. That's when he stopped. Daisy and Dustin watched from their hiding place with baited breath. They both jumped back about ten feet when Dart turned and looked right at them.

"Shit." Dustin hissed. Slowly, he leaned over again to look out, moving back quickly once more when Dart was still looking in their direction. "What do we do?" Daisy whispered, feeling her own heart rate increase.

Dustin didn't say anything. He took a deep breath, and before Daisy even realized what he was doing, he burst through the door of the shed, hockey stick at the ready. He hit Dart square in the center, sending him flying down into the storm cellar.

Daisy ran out after him, the two of them working together to get the doors shut before Dart ran back out. Once they were sure he was locked in, Daisy looked over to Dustin, catching her breath. "Now what?"

"We have to go to Mike's."

---

The two of them walked to the Wheeler's house (well, Daisy walked; Dustin took his bike) since their mother had taken the car to go look for Mews. Daisy only felt slightly relieved now that Dart was trapped, but her anxiety was still running high. She was trusting a group of thirteen-year-olds to take the lead on this – she was completely out of her element here. That was even if Dustin got a hold of his friends; he'd been trying to reach them for hours, but to no avail.

It seemed like luck just wasn't on their side today as Mr. Wheeler informed them that Mike (or Nancy) wasn't home. It looked like it was just going to be the two of them. Daisy put a hand on Dustin's shoulder as they walked back up the yard, about to scold him for the way he spoke to Mr. Wheeler, but she was stopped mid-thought when

she noticed a car pull up in front of the house.

Out of the car stepped the boy Daisy immediately recognized as Nancy's boyfriend, carrying flowers and murmuring something to himself as he walked towards the house. He didn't notice her and Dustin were even there until Dustin met him halfway, pointing to the flowers in his hands. "Steve," He called out. So *that* was his name. Steve. "Are those for Mr. or Mrs. Wheeler?"

"Uh... no?" He responded a bit skeptically. It was then that he finally realized Daisy's presence. There was a subtle recognition on his face, like he knew he'd seen her before somewhere. But then confusion overtook his features as he looked between her and Dustin, clearly perplexed as to why they were there together. Daisy forced a *very* awkward smile on her part, Steve's eyes boring into her's causing her cheeks to involuntarily turn red.

"Stop gawking at my sister, Harrington." Dustin broke the silence, seemingly snapping Steve out of his train of thought when he grabbed the flowers from his hands. Realization washed over Steve, hearing the word "sister," but he still looked awfully confused.

"Nancy's not home." Dustin said, making his way up to Steve's car. Daisy stayed where she was standing in the yard, not quite sure *what* Dustin was doing exactly. "Where is she?" Steve asked, sparing one more glance at Daisy before looking back over at Dustin.

"*Doesn't matter*," Dustin answered exasperatedly as he reached for the passenger's side door handle. "We have bigger problems than your love life. You still got that bat?" He asked, explaining further when Steve still wasn't picking up on what was happening. "The one with the nails."

"Nails?" Daisy asked, eyebrows raising, though neither of the boys seemed to hear her.

"I'll explain it on the way." She heard Dustin say. He waved her over, motioning to the back seat of Steve's car. "Come on, Daisy. Get in." He called out to her. She looked back at Steve, offering an apologetic smile on behalf of her brother's brashness... and, partly, for dragging him into this whole mess.

---

Daisy sat in the back seat, quiet as a mouse, her fingers playing with the hem of her sweater. She didn't mind that Dustin had taken the front seat. It was already awkward enough, and he clearly seemed to know Steve far more than she did. Truly she was surprised at how easy it was for Steve to agree to help them. Sure, he seemed skeptical (as anyone would, given the situation) but apparently he had been through what happened last year, so he knew what Dustin was saying couldn't be *totally* outrageous.

She was so lost in her thoughts that she wasn't even paying attention to the conversation Dustin and Steve were having up front. All she knew was that they were going back to Steve's house to get the bat with the nails (she was still very much uncertain about that) and then back to her and Dustin's house to handle the Dart situation. Daisy felt like her mind was running a mile a minute. She wasn't completely sure she was ready for this mission...

"So you go to Hawkins?"

The sound of Steve's voice directed at her brought her whirlwind of thoughts to a screeching halt. "Huh?" She quickly came back to reality, looking up to see his eyes meeting her's through the rear-view mirror. "Oh—" She shook her head, feeling her cheeks heat up in embarrassment once again for how spacey she was being. What a *great* first impression. "Yeah. I just started this year. I was at a private school before that."

"*That's* where I've seen you before." He said, snapping his fingers in realization. "I was gonna say, I'm pretty sure I'd have remembered you if you'd been there since freshman year. I'm Steve, by the way."

"I know." Daisy nodded, then immediately realized how creepy that sounded, and quickly added, "You're Nancy's boyfriend, right?" What was *wrong* with her today? She didn't understand why she was so flustered.

At the mention of Nancy, Daisy noticed his face fall ever so slightly. She immediately felt sorry for bringing it up – perhaps they were still in a fight from the party a couple nights ago.

"Not so sure about that anymore." He finally responded with a humorless laugh. Daisy looked down, her hands finding the hem of her sweater once again. She wasn't exactly sure how to respond without making him feel worse, so she settled on "I'm sorry," and left it at that.

Not too shortly after were they pulling up at Steve's house, and Daisy took a moment to admire how big it was. She wasn't sure what she would even *do* with so much space. "I'll be right out." Steve spoke up, once again breaking Daisy away from her thoughts. He got out of the car and jogged up to the front door, disappearing inside.

Dustin immediately turned around to face her once Steve was out of sight. "What is wrong with you? Why are you acting like some babbling schoolgirl?"

Daisy opened her mouth to speak, but no words came out. Instead, an offended look came across her features. "I am *not*." She responded in a hushed tone, her arms defensively coming up to cross over her chest. "I'm just... trying to wrap my head around what's going on right now."

"*Suuure*." Dustin sang, smiling mischievously. Daisy reached forward and whacked the brim of his hat, just in time for Steve to reemerge from the house, carrying a wooden baseball bat that had nails sticking out every which way of the top of it. He put it in the trunk and got back into the car, and Daisy shot Dustin a look saying *not* continue this conversation.

---

By the time they arrived back at the house, it was beginning to get dark outside. They pulled up into the driveway, and Daisy was relieved to see that the car was still gone, which meant their mother was still out looking for Mews. The three of them piled out of the car, and Steve went to the trunk to retrieve his bat.

As they walked over towards the storm cellar, Daisy pulled the sleeves of her sweater over her hands, feeling a chill in her body that had hardly anything to do with the weather. She was sure Dart wasn't going to be in a very good mood after being thrown down there, and that could only mean trouble for them.

The three stood in front of the cellar doors, silence falling over them. Steve hit the metal doors a couple times with the bat, and still... silence. He took the flashlight in his other hand and shined the light in Dustin's face. "Alright, kid. If this is some sort of Halloween prank..."

"It's not." Dustin said, holding his arm up to shield his eyes from the light. Daisy spoke up from the opposite side of Steve, "It's not, I promise." She said. "I've seen it... trust me, it's real."

Steve looked over at her, taking a moment to almost study her eyes. In them, he saw what he could only recognize as fear. He nodded his head, signifying that he believed her. Without another word, he leaned down to unlock the chain holding the doors closed, and pulled them both open. They all stared down into the darkness of the cellar, and again, nothing could be heard.

"I'll stay up here, to make sure he doesn't... escape." Daisy heard Dustin say, and she sighed, resigning to the fact that she was going to have to go down there with Steve. She wasn't about to let him go down there alone. Dart was clearly dangerous and if Steve got hurt (or worse) while doing this for *them*, well... she didn't really want to think about that.

She let him go first, but she was right behind him as they slowly descended the steps into the cellar. He had the bat held up and at the ready, just in case Dart decided to sneak up on them.

Instinctively, as they neared the bottom step, Daisy placed a hand on the back of his shoulder as a way to stay close to him. He didn't react to it or say anything about it (or maybe he was too preoccupied to even notice it was there) and he kept his gaze forward. Steve found the pull-string to turn on the light, and as the cellar illuminated, they could see that it was empty aside from the two of them.

Daisy promptly removed her hand from his shoulder. His eyes met her's again, and for some reason she found... reassurance in them. Steve's gaze then caught something on the floor, and Daisy followed it, her face scrunching up at the sight of what looked to be Dart's molted skin. Steve used the end of the bat to pick it up in order to get a better look. Holding it up in the light, it dripped with something of

a slime-like consistency.

"Oh no..." Daisy trailed off, pointing over towards the corner of the cellar. The two of them stepped forward, Steve making sure he was still in front of her. There was a rather large hole left in the wall, and what looked to be an underground tunnel leading out from it. "He had to have escaped." Daisy said, bringing her bottom lip in between her teeth nervously. There was no telling where Dart could have possibly gone or if he'd harmed anyone or anything else on his way.

"Hey, don't worry. It's alright." Steve said, standing upright, clearly sensing her nervousness. "We'll just have to find him again." Daisy gave a small smile, though his words didn't do very much to calm her down. She appreciated the effort, though.

"Steve? Daisy? What's going on down there?" They both looked over towards the entrance of the cellar at the sound of Dustin's voice from up above. Steve stepped over, shining the flashlight up the stairway. "Get down here."

Dustin did as instructed, coming down the steps to meet the two of them down there. Daisy pointed to the skin Dart had shed hanging from the bat. "He molted again." She told him. Dustin looked between that, and the giant hole in the wall, his face falling in the realization that this was a very, very, *bad* situation. "Oh, *shit*."

The three of them stood in silence, contemplating what their next move was. It was getting late, but they couldn't just leave Dart out there, wherever he was, on the loose. Who knows how big he had gotten this time.

Dustin perked his head up after a moment, breaking the silence between them.

"I have an idea."

## 5. Chapter 5

A/N: Hello, hello! Can I just say, I really enjoyed writing this chapter. I even added some stuff from Steve's point of view for a change, which I hope you guys like! Thank you all again for your continued support and interest in this story! Also, if I don't get another update in before Christmas, I want to wish my readers a very happy holiday and a happy New Year as well! Enjoy!

---

To say Daisy was exhausted was a vast understatement. She hadn't slept at all yet; her, Dustin, and Steve had been up all night and into the early morning working on their plan to find Dart. This wasn't the first all-nighter Daisy had ever experienced (and those were typically only reserved for studying the night before a big test), but she certainly was having a hard time keeping up right about now.

Even now, in the backseat of Steve's car, her eyelids were so heavy she was having trouble keeping them open. The silence that had fallen between the three of them, and the steady motion of the car had her dozing off every few minutes. She was still in the same outfit she had on the previous day, not having had any time to change, and her brown hair was in a sloppy mess of a ponytail that had loose strands coming down to hang by her face. Her head came down to rest against the cool window, a quiet yawn escaping her lips.

The three of them were headed to the nearest and earliest open grocery store in town to get a whole bunch of raw meat, which they had all pooled their money together in order to buy. Dustin had the idea of leaving a food trail to lead Dart somewhere where they would be able to (hopefully) capture him. What they were going to do *after* they captured him, Daisy was still uncertain about.

The car came to a stop just as Daisy was beginning to drift off to sleep, and the sound of the engine cutting off caused her to slowly open her eyes. That was far too short of a car ride, and she felt even more groggy than she did before. Pushing herself up straight again, she caught Steve's eye in the rear-view mirror. He looked tired as well - not nearly as bad as she did, though. Dustin, on the other hand,

seemed wide awake.

"You gonna make it, Daisy?" Steve asked as they got out of the car. His tone was light and joking, but Daisy swore she could have heard some actual concern in his voice too. She put on a smile, nodding her head. Her eyes still felt heavy, but getting up and walking about seemed to wake her up a bit more. "I think so." She answered back with a small laugh.

After purchasing quite a few pounds of raw meat, some big metal pails, and yellow rubber gloves (and receiving *many* odd looks from the cashier) the three of them were on their way once again, headed towards the train tracks. As the sun rose higher up in the sky, Daisy began to feel more awake. But she was sure that running on no sleep was going to catch up with her eventually. Every so often, the craziness of the situation would hit her and quite honestly, she surprised even herself at how easily she was just going along with it.

It took nearly half an hour for them to arrive at the train tracks. Dustin knew of a vacant junkyard (Daisy didn't even want to know *how*) that they would lead the trail of meat to and with any luck, be able to do away with Dart and let things go back to normal again. Well... as normal as things *could* get.

As they unpacked the trunk of the essential items, the walkie-talkie that Dustin always carried around started to make noise. A voice that Daisy recognized as his friend, Lucas, came through. While the two of them talked back and forth, Daisy turned to Steve, who she had become considerably more comfortable around since the previous day. She figured it had a lot to do with the fact that they'd been with each other for nearly 24 hours straight.

"You want help with those?" She asked, pointing down to the two large pails on the ground that were currently filled to the brim with the meat they had bought. She wrinkled her nose at the smell of it, as it had been sitting in the trunk for a little while. Steve shook his head. "No, it's alright. We've got these. They're pretty heavy." He said, looking over to Dustin who had just ended his conversation with Lucas.

"Well, what should I do then?" Daisy asked, watching as the two boys



donned their yellow rubber gloves. She didn't want to feel *completely* useless, just tagging along as they did all the work. "You'll go up ahead as look-out." Dustin told her. "You just have to keep an eye out for any signs of Dart and you'll be far enough in front of us that we'll be able to watch out for you."

Daisy appreciated the concern from Dustin, keeping her ahead of them so that they could keep their eyes on her. But she still felt slightly uneasy about it. "So that means if Dart decides to come out of the woods, *I'll* be the first one he gets." She said, her voice coming across very hesitant.

"Here," Steve said, reaching into the trunk and handing her the nail bat. Daisy took it in her hands and stared at it, almost perplexed. "And we'll be right behind you if anything happens." He added, being sure to offer a reassuring smile. Daisy stared at the bat for a few seconds, wondering if she would even know what to *do* with it if something were to happen, before meeting eyes with Steve again.

"Alright."

---

Daisy was up a considerable amount ahead of Steve and Dustin as they trailed the train tracks, tossing chunks of meat every few steps as they went. Steve was still trying to wrap his brain around what was going on here. All the events of last year seemed to come flooding back to his memories as he felt the same rush of anxiety and adrenaline. At least this time around, he felt slightly more prepared for the danger instead of being thrown right into it.

"So let me get this straight," He said, tossing a piece of meat to the ground. "You kept something you knew was probably dangerous in order to impress a girl who you just met?" To be completely truthful though, Steve could remember doing a lot to try and impress Nancy when he first met her, so he could somewhat understand where Dustin was coming from. "What made you think she would've liked some slug anyway?"

"An inter-dimensional slug? Because it's *awesome*." Dustin answered, smiling as he thought back to when Dart was small and *not* deadly. Steve only shrugged. "It just seems like you're trying too hard, man."

"Well, not all of us can have your perfect hair." Dustin responded, and Steve noted the way the younger boy's face fell. He felt a pang of sympathy for Dustin, feeling almost like he *needed* to give him some guidance in the world of girls and dating. "It's not about the hair. The key with girls is to just... act like you don't care."

"Even if you do?" Dustin asked, looking up at Steve.

"Yeah, exactly. It drives 'em nuts." He said. For some reason, his gaze moved over to Daisy, who was far enough ahead of them to not overhear their conversation. He didn't necessarily think she'd approve of the advice he was giving to her younger brother. "Then you just wait," He added, looking back towards Dustin. "Until you *feel* it."

"Feel what?" The younger boy questioned.

"It's like before it's gonna storm, you know. You can't see it but you can feel it, like this, uh... electricity." Steve tried his best to explain, thinking back to when he and Nancy first started dating. He could remember feeling that exact feeling of electricity with her, and he was beginning to wonder if she had *ever* felt it too.

"Like the electromagnetic field..." Dustin began to trail off, trying to make the connection between what Steve was saying, and with the science that he was so interested in. Steve shook his head. "No, no, no. Like a... like a sexual electricity. You feel *that*, and then you make your move."

Dustin nodded, an intrigued look on his face now. "That's when you kiss her?"

"Woah, woah. Slow down, Romeo." Steve immediately responded, and Dustin cast his gaze downward. "Sure, some girls like it like that; hot and heavy, strong, like a... like a lion. But with some girls, you gotta be stealthy. Like a ninja."

"What type was Nancy?" Dustin asked.

Steve didn't really have to think about it before answering. "Nancy's different. She's different than all the other girls." He tried his best not to look too distraught in front of Dustin. Thinking about Nancy, their

fight, the things she said to him... he hated reliving that. He was glad when Dustin spoke up again, bringing his mind elsewhere.

"But this girl's special too, you know. There's just something about her..." Dustin began to say, but Steve was quick to cut him off. "You're not falling in love with this girl, are you?"

Dustin stared up at Steve, unsure of what to say. Sure, he liked Max... but was he falling in love with her? Was he even *old* enough to know what that felt like? Finally, he shook his head. "No, no."

"Good. *Don't*. She's only gonna break your heart and you're way too young for that shit." Steve said, throwing another piece of meat to the ground with a bit more force than necessary.

Dustin was quiet again, his eyes looking down towards the ground. Steve peered over at him from the corner of his eye, once again noticing the look on his face. He suddenly felt a certain... protectiveness over the boy and he couldn't quite understand why.

"It's Faberge." Steve finally spoke up again, causing Dustin to look up, confused. "Huh?" He asked.

"Faberge Organics." Steve explained further, motioning to his hair. "Use the shampoo and the conditioner, and when your hair is damp-not *wet*, damp-you do four puffs of the Farrah Fawcett spray."

Dustin bit back an amused smile. "Farrah Fawcett spray?"

Steve stopped walking, causing Dustin to do the same. The smile disappeared from Dustin's face when he saw the seriousness in Steve's. "Yeah, Farrah Fawcett. You tell *anyone* I told you that," For some reason *again*, his eyes flickered over to Daisy, quickly enough that he hoped Dustin didn't notice. "And your ass is grass, Henderson. You understand?"

Dustin nodded his head. "Yup."

They continued on walking in silence for a bit longer, and Steve's eyes found Daisy again. He noticed that she looked back a couple times, seemingly to make sure they were still behind her. He could tell she was tired; he could see it on her face. Honestly, Steve had to

give her credit. She was doing fairly well handling all that was going on, given that she didn't go through what happened last year.

"Your sister, she's uh... pretty cool." Steve spoke up again, bringing Dustin's attention back once more.

"Yeah... she's awesome." Dustin smiled. He was quiet for another few moments, looking as if he was thinking hard about something. Their previous conversation still clearly fresh in the boy's mind, he looked back up at Steve, pure curiosity written on his face. "Do you feel that kind of... *electricity* when you're around her?"

Steve's eyes widened a bit, obviously not expecting that question. Quickly, he shook his head. "*What?* No, man. No... that's your sister. And besides, I *just* met her."

However, the few times Daisy would turn her head to look back at them, she caught Steve's eyes more than once. And she'd smile at him, and he'd feel this... *something*. But it wasn't the sexual electricity he was talking about with Dustin. It was something different. There was something more endearing about it. He wasn't about to admit that to Dustin, though.

"Just wondering." Dustin said, putting his hand up defensively.

---

The walk seemed like it was never going to end, but finally, they reached a clearing. There was the junkyard right ahead of them, filled with old abandoned cars and school buses. The boys had finally caught up with Daisy and she was glad her job as look-out was over. All she kept thinking while walking along those train tracks was that Dart could burst right out in front of her at any time.

"Oh, yeah. Yeah, this'll do. Good call, buddy." She heard Steve say from beside her, as he patted Dustin on the shoulder. She followed them over towards an empty space in the yard and watched as they dumped the remaining bit of meat onto the ground. A sudden voice from up on the hill caused them all to look up.

"I said medium well!" Daisy looked over to see Lucas standing there waving at them, and an unfamiliar redhead standing next to him.

Daisy lifted her hand to wave back, hearing Steve ask who the girl was with Lucas as the two of them descended the hill towards them. Daisy wondered the same thing, but the moment she looked at Dustin's face, she had a pretty strong feeling - that must have been Max. The girl Dustin would rave to her about, telling Daisy stories about her with a big smile on his face. But seeing her here with Lucas, Dustin didn't have that same smile on his face anymore.

Daisy could tell Dustin seemed hurt, but she knew he wasn't going to want to talk about it in front of everyone, so she didn't ask him about it. She figured that conversation could wait until later. From the look on Steve's face, it seemed he was realizing the same thing, but he decided to keep quiet about it as well, for Dustin's sake. Quickly, they shared the plan with Lucas and Max, letting them know what needed to be done. And then, everyone got to work.

They decided to make the school bus their base, so they had to blockade all the doors and windows, making it impossible for Dart to get in there if he tried. Steve had gone to grab some more scrap metal and Lucas and Dustin had disappeared somewhere to talk. Daisy noticed Max struggling with a rather large slab of metal, so she went over to help, grabbing the other side of it for her.

"Thanks." Max said quietly. Daisy could tell that Max was just as out of her element here as she was. She offered a smile to the younger girl after they were able to get the piece of metal upright and against the side of the bus. "No problem. I'm Daisy, by the way. Dustin's sister." She introduced herself, brushing her hands off on her jeans before extending one to the redhead.

"Max." She responded, confirming Daisy's suspicions, and shaking her hand. She was certainly a little rough around the edges, but Daisy could see why Dustin liked her. She looked over just in time to see Steve hit the car that Lucas and Dustin were hiding behind with a metal chair. "Hey, dickheads! How come the only ones helping me are Daisy and this random girl? We lose light in 40 minutes, let's go."

Daisy stifled a laugh, turning back towards Max to help her with a ladder they had found. The two girls worked together to carry it inside the bus and get it set up in the sunroof opening. Daisy briefly wondered how much Max knew about what was happening and what

had happened last year. She could only imagine that if Lucas was the one who told her, then that's what he and Dustin had to have been arguing about a few minutes prior.

"Here, let me help you." Steve came up behind Daisy and helped lift the end of the ladder she was carrying. Their hands brushed together in the process and Daisy fought hard against blushing, even if it was totally out of her control. "Thank you." She smiled once they successfully got the ladder inside the bus and had set it upright, through the opening up top. "No problem. I'm gonna go see how they're doing out there." He said, heading back outside to help the boys out.

"Is that your boyfriend?" Max asked from beside her, and Daisy nearly jumped, almost forgetting the girl was even there. "Steve? No... no, he's just—" She paused for a split second, truly unsure of how to describe what he was to her. They'd only just met no less than 24 hours ago. "A friend." She finally settled on that, earning a very unconvinced look from Max.

By the time everything was in place, it was beginning to get dark outside. The five of them all congregated inside the bus. "And now we wait." Dustin muttered aloud. Lucas had taken his binoculars and gone up to the roof to be a look-out. Daisy took a seat, and it was almost instantaneous that her exhaustion crept back up on her. Now that she wasn't actively moving, that same tired feeling from before overtook her. Steve had sat down beside her, flicking the lighter in his hand on and off. He looked over at her, noticing how heavy her eyelids looked.

"If you're tired, you can..." Steve trailed off quietly, looking down towards his shoulder, silently signifying that she was welcome to rest her head there. Any other time, Daisy may have hesitated, even said no, that it was okay. But she was so tired. Slowly, she laid her head on his shoulder, eyes closing. Max watched the interaction closely before speaking up, quietly so as not to disturb Daisy from her rest.

"So you actually fought one of these things before?" She asked Steve, who nodded his head in response. "And you're completely, 100% sure it wasn't a bear?"

"No, don't be stupid." Dustin answered before Steve had the opportunity to. "Why are you even here if you don't believe us? Just go home." He was upset, clearly. But Steve seemed to think it was just him taking his advice from earlier. Max scoffed as she made her way up the ladder to go and sit with Lucas.

"Dustin," Daisy's voice came out mumbled and tired, her head still on Steve's shoulder and her eyes staying shut as she spoke. "Don't be rude."

Steve, on the other hand, gave Dustin a look of approval. "That's it, man. Just show her you don't care."

"I don't." Dustin was quick to respond, anger evident in his voice. Daisy carefully opened her eyes, peering up at Steve. "That's horrible advice, you know." She said, trying to sound stern, but her voice was so groggy it was hard for him to take it seriously.

Silence fell over them, and Daisy didn't fight it when her eyes started to close again. The peacefulness of the situation only lasted but a few more minutes, until the distant sound of a strange gurgle or growling could be heard. Daisy's eyes opened up rather quickly this time as she sat up straight, recognizing the sound. It had to be Dart.

The three of them were on their feet in an instant, all peeking out an exposed corner of the window. It was dark, and Daisy could hardly see anything other than the fog.

"Ten o'clock! Ten o'clock!" They heard Lucas shout from the roof. In the distance, they could just make out the figure of Dart, standing within the fog outside. But something was wrong – he wasn't taking the bait. If he didn't take the bait, their entire plan wasn't going to work.

"Maybe he's not hungry." Dustin murmured.

"Maybe he's sick of cow." Steve responded, staring out the window. He took a step back, a serious look on his face, deep in thought. Finally, he picked up the bat and made his way toward the door.

"Wait!" Daisy called out, watching him incredulously. "You're not

going out there, are you?"

"Just stay here." He said, his eyes on her, though he tossed the lighter to Dustin. "And be ready."

"Steve!" Daisy stepped forward, her hand wrapping ever so gently around his wrist. He could see the fear in her eyes, clear as day. "Are you crazy? You could get *killed*."

There was that feeling of... *something*, again, as she stared into his eyes, her gaze almost pleading for him not to go out there. Steve took her hand in his, squeezing it reassuringly. "I'll be fine. I promise."

Daisy very reluctantly let go of his hand, realizing this wasn't a battle she was going to win. Steve slowly stepped out of the bus, and Daisy and Dustin immediately went back to the window. Max had joined them back down there as well, and they watched as Steve stood, ready with the bat in his hands. Dart was slowly moving closer, and Daisy's heartrate seemed to increase with every passing second.

"Steve!" They all looked up when they heard Lucas yelling again. "Three o'clock! Three o'clock!"

Daisy's heart dropped the moment she saw that there wasn't just one Dart out there... there were multiple. And right about now, they had Steve surrounded. Dustin ran to the door, yanking it open. "Steve!" He called out, panic in his tone. "Abort! Abort!"

Just as Dart started a beeline for Steve, he rolled over the hood of a nearby car and out of the way just in time. Daisy watched in horror, all of the kids coming to the door and yelling for Steve to get back in. He ran as fast as he could, making it back to the bus in just the right amount of time to close the door, holding it shut with his feet.

The bus rattled from every which way as the large creatures slammed against it, trying to get inside. Daisy fell back against the wall, but had hardly any time to react when a giant claw burst through the metal, just narrowly missing her. Her scream echoed through the bus as Dustin yelled into his walkie-talkie for help.

Suddenly the roof of the bus began to shake, and it was clear that one



of them was on top of it. Max stood by the opening, staring up, seemingly frozen to the spot. Dart emerged up above them, his face opening up as a loud roar came from his mouth. Daisy quickly sprang into action, grabbing a screaming Max around the waist and pulling her out of the way.

"Get back!" Steve yelled, quickly moving in front of them, ready to swing the bat if Dart tried to come down there. But just before he had the chance, they heard a howl-like sound which caused everyone, even Dart to stop where they were. They all stared up, eyes equally wide in horror, unsure of what was going to happen. Dart let out a loud call of his own before leaping off the roof of the bus. All of the creatures retreated back into the woods, as though they were called back by something.

Thick silence fell over them again, the only sounds coming from their heavy, rapid breathing. No one dared to move from the spot they were in. Once they were sure that Dart and the rest of them were gone, Steve slowly made his way toward the door again, the rest of the group close behind him. When he opened the doors and peeked out, he could see the last of the retreating creatures running off into the trees.

"*What* happened?" Lucas asked, following Steve out of the bus.

"Maybe Steve scared them off?" Dustin suggested.

"No," Steve said, looking back at the rest of them, the bat slung over his shoulder. "They're going somewhere."

## 6. Chapter 6

A/N: Hello! I hope you all had a wonderful holiday! I apologize for the wait on this chapter, I would have had it up sooner but for some reason the website wouldn't let me upload it yesterday. On a side note, I went and made a Tumblr account sort-of dedicated to this story (and any future stories I may write) just for visuals and graphics and whatnot. The link is on my profile if you're interested in checking it out! Thank you all again for your continued support! Enjoy!

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Daisy stared off in the direction of the woods, the look on her face matching everyone else's - shock, confusion, fear, bewilderment. *What* had just happened? Her adrenaline was running wild. It was eerily quiet now that those *things* had run off, and Daisy still felt on edge, even now that they were gone. What if they came back? What if this was just some way to lure them out of the bus-outside and vulnerable-so that they could come back and finish the job?

She really had no idea what they were dealing with here. The harsh reality of what was going on was starting to hit her, and with such a close call as with what had just happened, she only had a bad feeling in the pit of her stomach. This couldn't possibly end well for them.

But she didn't want Dustin (or the rest of the group, for that matter) to see that she was worried, scared, or internally panicking. For some reason she felt like she had to put up a strong front, at least in front of the kids. Even if they'd dealt with this situation before (with the exception of Max), Daisy still wanted them to know that she was there for them.

"Where do you think they went?" She heard Max ask, bringing her attention back to the group. Daisy had no suggestions - she was just as lost as Max was here.

"I don't know. But it looks like they got *called* away." Steve spoke up, still holding his bat closely in case something decided to sneak up on them unexpectedly.

"Well, I personally think we should get out of here before they decide to come back." Daisy said. She felt a wave of relief when everyone nodded their heads in agreement. She certainly didn't feel up to staying around the junkyard any longer. The only problem now was that they had to walk back to where Steve's car was... in the dark, and with those creatures possibly still lurking about.

They began their trek back to the car, the kids all walking together in a group while Daisy and Steve trailed closely behind them. Daisy spared a quick glance over at Steve, still shocked at the fact that he had put himself in an immense amount of danger by going out to face those monsters on his own. He got lucky, that was for sure, because she didn't think his bat would have taken down all of them.

"You doing okay?" She heard Steve ask from beside her. Daisy took a moment to consider his question. *Was* she doing okay? Not really. But she forced a (probably unconvincing) smile on her face and nodded her head. "I'll be fine." She assured him, and now it was Steve's turn to look unconvinced. He could tell she truly wasn't fine, but then again, he really wasn't either. None of them were, he could only assume.

Every little sound that came from the woods was enough to startle Daisy. The sound of the kids talking did seem to calm her nerves a little bit, however, for some odd reason. She was vaguely listening to what they were talking about, more concerned with making sure she didn't hear any concerning noises that could potentially mean danger for them.

She came back into the conversation when she heard them talking about Dart. "He was tiny two days ago." She heard Max say, confused at how he had grown such an immense amount in such a short period of time. Honestly, Daisy didn't quite understand it either.

"Yeah, well he's molted *three* times since then." Dustin retorted.

Now it was Steve's turn to look confused. "Molted?"

"Shed his skin to make room for more growth." Dustin explained, and Daisy couldn't help but smile fondly at her brother, continuously impressed with how much he knew at still such a young age.

"Like a snake." Daisy added in for clarification. "When will he molt again?" Max asked. Daisy looked to Dustin for an answer, seeing as he had a better grasp on what was going on here than she did.

"It's gotta be soon. And when he does he'll be fully grown, or close to it. So will his friends." Dustin said.

"Yeah, and he's gonna eat a lot more than just cats." Steve interjected.

"Wait. Dart ate a *cat*?" Now it was Lucas' turn to speak up. He stopped in his tracks, which caused Dustin and the rest of them to do the same. "What? No..." Dustin tried miserably to lie, but Lucas saw right through it.

"What are you talking about?" Steve asked. "He ate Mews."

"Who's Mews?" Max questioned now. Daisy found herself looking between each person as they spoke up, finding it hard to keep up with the conversations going on.

"It's Dustin and Daisy's cat." Steve responded nonchalantly, clearly not picking up on the fact the Dustin had planned on keeping that sensitive piece of information between them.

Voices erupted after that, as Lucas turned to Dustin, throwing his hands in the air. "I knew it! You kept him!"

"No, no, no..." Dustin quickly tried to defend, but ultimately he knew this was a battle lost. "He missed me." He finally gave in, earning quite the angry look from Lucas. "He wanted to come home."

"Bullshit." Lucas shot back.

"I didn't know he was a demogorgon!" Dustin exclaimed. Daisy realized tensions were running high, and the last thing they needed right now was to all turn on each other. "Guys, come on..." She attempted to calm the two of them down, but it was as if she wasn't even standing there. Her words went right over their heads.

"You put the party in jeopardy!" Lucas yelled back. "You broke the rule of law!"

"So did you! You told a *stranger*-" Dustin responded, shining the flashlight in his hand right in Max's face, "-the truth."

"A *stranger*?" Now it was Max's turn to get angry, stepping right up in with the boys as the three of them started yelling at each other back and forth.

"Come on, there's no time for fighting, you guys." Daisy tried again but to no avail. Not one of them was listening to her. It was as if she was invisible.

"Guys!" The sound of Steve's raised voice shut them all right up. All four of them turned to look over to where he had stepped forward, staring off into the woods. It was in that moment that they all heard what Steve had just heard. The same noises they'd heard when they were under attack were coming from within the trees.

Steve was first to start heading in that direction, Lucas and Dustin not too far behind. Daisy and Max stood back, both clearly unsure of *why* they decided to follow the sound. Why couldn't they just head back to the car, like they had originally planned?

"Why are you headed *towards* the sound?" Max called after them, but the boys were already well on their way. She and Daisy shared a look, both understanding that their only option was to follow them - not that either of them really *wanted* to.

"Shit." Max muttered as the two of them hurried off to catch up with the boys.

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They all followed the noises up to a clearing that overlooked the town. It was mostly trees, so it was hard to make out where the creatures could have possibly gone to. In the distance, they could still hear those distinct noises, though thankfully they sounded far enough away to be of any immediate concern.

"I don't see them." Dustin said, and Daisy squinted her eyes to try and get a better look as well. She didn't have much luck though, especially since it was dark out. Lucas took out his binoculars, pointing out across the treeline after a moment. "It's the lab." He said,

and all of them followed his finger to where he was pointing. "They were going back home."

Daisy could briefly make out the outline of the lab in the darkness of the trees, seeing lights flash from it every now and again. She had a bad feeling that the boys were going to want to head over that way to check it out, and it only confirmed her suspicions when Steve, Dustin, and Lucas once again took the lead and began walking in that direction.

Her and Max were a bit quicker to follow this time, knowing that they all had to stay together, and that the two of them weren't going to sway the boys' minds about turning back. The fact that they were now headed through the woods, though, did make Daisy a little uneasy. She trusted that the boys knew *somewhat* of what they were getting into, but that still had a hard time easing her nerves.

The walk through the woods was surprisingly short, and quiet for the most part. Everyone had fallen into silence, presumably lost in their own thoughts, the only sounds coming from their feet on the ground. Luckily it seemed as though the tension had dissipated between the kids - for now, at least. Daisy hated to see them fight, especially Dustin and Lucas. They'd been good friends for so long, she didn't want some silly fight (ultimately about a girl, she figured out rather quickly) to be something that tore them apart.

As they neared the edge of the woods, Daisy could see a car up ahead through the trees. A voice called out no more than a few seconds later, asking who was there. Whoever was at the car must have seen their flashlights shining through the treeline. None of them answered; instead they came fully out of the woods now, to see for themselves who had called out to them.

"Steve?" Now it was two voices that could be heard, in unison and sounding equally shocked.

Daisy looked over at Steve, seeing his face fall, before turning her gaze ahead to see Nancy Wheeler and Jonathan Byers standing there together.

"Nancy?" Steve asked, trying his hardest not to look as hurt as he was

truly feeling in that moment. No one else may have noticed but Daisy could see right through it after noticing the look on his face just a few seconds prior - like he'd been kicked right in the stomach. She was sure that seeing Nancy and Jonathan here together had his mind going crazy with the worst possible thoughts.

They all met each other halfway in the grass by the big gate in front of the lab, everyone still clearly confused at why the other group was there. Daisy locked eyes with Nancy unintentionally, the two just staring at each other for a few very uncomfortable seconds. Daisy could tell that Nancy was surprised to see her there.

"We're looking for Mike and Will." Nancy finally spoke up, breaking eye contact with Daisy. Daisy let out a breath she didn't even realize she had been holding in, feeling extremely awkward right about now, and she wasn't even sure why.

"They're not in there are they?" Dustin asked, motioning towards the building.

"I'm not sure." Nancy responded, uncertainty in her tone. "Why?"

Before anyone could answer, a loud, growl-like sound could be heard from the lab. Everyone looked over in that direction, and just about everyone had the same look of stomach-dropping fear on their faces. If Mike and Will really *were* in there... well, that couldn't mean anything good.

Jonathan sprang into action first, rushing over to the control station, rapidly pressing a button in an attempt to get the gate unlocked. Unfortunately it looked like the power was out and the gate wasn't budging. Dustin went in and just about pushed Jonathan out of the way so that he could give it a try. The rest of them could only stand there and wait, hoping that somehow they could gain entry onto the grounds.

Just as it felt like they should just give up all hope on it, the gate suddenly began to open. "Hey, I got it!" Dustin could be heard over in the control station, clearly proud of himself.

"You guys wait here." Jonathan said as he hurriedly got over to his

car, looking to Nancy to get in as well. She took a moment to look uncomfortably between both Steve and Jonathan before ultimately getting into the passengers seat. Again, the look on Steve's face was not lost on Daisy.

Dustin and Lucas started to protest, clearly wanting to go as well and help their friends. Daisy stopped both of them as they made a start for the car. "It'll be fine. Mike and Will will be okay, but we have to wait down here." She said calmly, earning looks of disapproval from both of them, but in the end they did listen to her.

Once the car was out of sight, all they could do now was wait and hope for the best. Dustin and Lucas both paced back and forth on the pavement, while Steve leaned against one of the walls on the control station. He looked deep in thought, staring at the ground as he flipped the flashlight in his hand over and over again.

Daisy wanted to ask if he was okay, but decided against it in that moment. The wound was clearly still fresh and he probably needed time to just think about it himself. She was sure he wouldn't want to talk about it, especially with her, who he'd only just met. Instead, Daisy turned to Max, who she noticed had stayed particularly closer to her. "You alright?" She asked the younger girl, knowing it must have been a whirlwind for her, being thrown into all of this.

"Not really." Max replied honestly, looking from the boys back over to Daisy. "Are you?"

"Not really." Daisy answered the same, leaning back against the fence. "It's a bit much to take in all at once, you know?"

Max nodded her head in agreement. "Yeah, it is."

They fell silent again after a moment, until the distant sound of screeching tires could be heard from up ahead. After a couple seconds, Jonathan's car came back into view again, coming speeding down the driveway and right past the group of them. Then a second car came to a halt right in front of them, and the man driving who Daisy recognized as the police chief waved them over. "Get in!"

Not needing to be told twice, they all piled into the truck, Steve



making sure all the kids and Daisy got in before he hopped into the passengers seat and closed the door. The truck barreled out of the driveway not a moment later as they sped away from the lab.

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They all arrived at the Byers' home not too shortly after, and Daisy watched as a crying Mrs. Byers went straight into her bedroom and closed the door. They'd all learned from Mike that her boyfriend, Bob, had just been killed by the creatures in the lab. Hearing that only made the danger of this situation all the more real to Daisy.

She joined the kids where they were sitting in the kitchen, all watching intently as the chief yelled on the phone to try and get some kind of back-up. Clearly it seemed he wasn't having much luck with it. Daisy's eyes met Steve's as he came into the kitchen a few minutes later, but neither of them could muster up even a small smile at this point.

The chief finally (and aggressively) hung up the phone, turning to look at the rest of them. "They didn't believe you, did they?" Dustin asked from his spot over at the table.

"We'll see." Hopper said, clearly still ticked off about the conversation he'd just had.

"We'll see? We can't just sit here while those things are loose!" Mike exclaimed angrily from his seat. Daisy was a bit surprised to see him talk to Hopper like that. To her, he was rather intimidating.

"We stay here, and we wait for help." Hopper responded sternly, not waiting to any of the kids to fight back before he turned and walked into the other room.

The kitchen fell quiet after that. It seemed as though everyone shared the same, defeated looks on their faces. No one really knew what to say, so everyone settled for silence. Daisy stared down at her hands, her heart aching for Mrs. Byers. She had just looked so... *broken*. Daisy didn't know Bob, but he had to have been pretty special, judging by the amount of sadness hanging over everyone.

The silence was broken when Mike spoke up again. "We can't let Bob

die in vain."

"Well, what do you wanna do, Mike?" Dustin asked. "The chief's right on this. We can't stop those demodogs on our own."

"Demodogs?" Max asked, her eyebrows coming together in confusion.

"Demogorgon... dogs... *demodogs*. It's like a compound." Dustin explained, still earning a skeptical look from Max. He spoke up again after a moment. "When it was just Dart, maybe. But now there's an army."

"*His* army." Everyone looked over at Mike as realization swept over the boy like a wave. "Maybe if we stop him, we can stop his army too."

Daisy's face wrinkled in confusion, not knowing *whose* army they were talking about. She was having a hard time keeping up, so when everyone followed Mike into the other room, Daisy did the same. He held up a drawing that she guessed was done by Will.

"The shadow monster. It got Will that day on the field. The doctor said it was like a virus, it infected him." Mike explained.

"So this virus is connecting him to the tunnels?" Max questioned.

"To the tunnels, to the monsters, to the Upside Down, to everything. If the vines feel something like pain, so does Will." Mike said. Daisy was slowly starting to catch on, remembering learning about viruses in a science class once before. "This is the thing that controls everything. This is the brain." Mike spoke up again.

"It's the Mind Flayer." Dustin chimed in from beside Mike.

"*The what?*" Daisy, Steve, and Max all said in unison.

Dustin began rummaging through a pile of books that was in Will's room, finally finding the one he was looking for and bringing it out into the kitchen to show everyone. He opened it up to a page with a picture of some sort of monster-looking creature on it, with the name "Mind Flayer" next to it.

"It's a monster from an unknown dimension. It's so ancient that it doesn't even know its true home. It enslaves races of other dimensions by taking over their brains using its highly cyonic powers." Dustin explained to everyone, earning skeptical looks all around.

"None of this is real, it's a kid's game." Hopper said, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"No, it's a manual." Dustin corrected. "And it's *not* for kids, and unless you know something that we don't, this is the best metaphor—"

"Analogy." Lucas interrupted.

"Analogy? *That's* what you're worried about?" Dustin exclaimed, and Daisy placed a hand on her brother's shoulder to urge him to continue. Clearly the tension was still palpable with those two.

"Okay, so this mind flamer thing—" Nancy spoke up, only to be interrupted by Dustin. "*Flayer*. Mind Flayer." He corrected. Nancy inhaled, rolling her eyes before continuing. "What does it want?"

"To conquer us, basically." Said Dustin. "It believes it's the master race. It views other races, like us, as inferior to itself."

"It wants to spread, and take over other dimensions." Mike chimed in from beside Dustin.

"We are talking about the destruction of our world as we know it." Lucas added.

"That's great, that's great... that's really great." Steve stepped away from the table, running a hand through his hair. Daisy bit down on her bottom lip, her arms coming up to cross over her chest. This *was* all a lot to take in. If the boys were right about this Mind Flayer thing, that couldn't mean good things for them at all.

"So how do we defeat this thing? Throw fire balls at it or something?" Chief Hopper asked, grabbing the book off the table to get a better look at what they were dealing with.

"No, no... no fire balls. You summon an undead army, because

zombies... you know, they... don't have brains and the Mind Flayer, it... likes brains." Dustin tried to explain, but when he saw the look on Hopper's face, he realized that an army of zombies just wasn't realistic. "It's just a game." Dustin finally gave in, shaking his head.

Hopper gave a disgruntled groan as he tossed the book back onto the table. "I thought we were waiting for your military back-up?" Dustin asked him.

"We can't just shoot this thing with guns!" Mike shouted.

"We don't *know* that! We don't know anything!" Hopper shot back, clearly growing just as frustrated as everyone else in the room seemed to already be.

"We know that it's already killed everyone in that lab. And they're going to molt again. And it's only a matter of time before those tunnels reach this town." The boys all piped up.

"They're right." Everyone turned around at the sound of Mrs. Byers' voice. Daisy frowned as she looked at the woman. She could just feel the hurt and the hatred for these things just radiating off her. "We have to kill it. I *want* to kill it."

"Me too, Joyce. But how do we do that? We don't exactly know what they're dealing with here." Hopper tried to reason with her.

"But he does." Mike said, looking over to Will, who was still asleep over on the couch, thanks to anesthetics from the lab. "If anyone knows how to destroy this thing, it's Will. He's connected to him. He'll know his weakness."

"I thought we couldn't trust him anymore? That he's a spy for the Mind Flayer?" Max questioned.

"Yeah," Mike said, an idea coming to him just then. "But he can't spy if he doesn't know where he is."

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Everyone got to work after that, setting up a make-shift interrogation room in the shed in the backyard. From what Daisy could understand, if Will didn't know where he was, he couldn't spy for the

monster and lead the tunnels (and those demodogs) to where they were. The plan was to cover every inch of the shed so that when Will got in there and woke up, he wouldn't recognize that he was actually right at home. And then, somehow, they could try and get some answers out of him on how to destroy the thing that was controlling him.

Steve was inside the shed, using a staple gun to attach a large tarp over the walls. He recognized that Nancy was standing right next to him, but he didn't say anything. He couldn't *bring* himself to say anything. It was so painfully awkward between the two of them, and he hated it. He hated what had become of them. He had been so sure Nancy was *the one*. She had made it clear that that wasn't the case.

He was dying to ask her if anything had happened between her and Jonathan. They'd been off who-knows-where together for the last two days. And seeing how the two of them acted around each other spoke volumes. They'd connected on some level other than just friendship, Steve was sure of that. He wanted to know, but at the same time, he didn't think he could bear to hear the answer.

"Hey," He jumped a little at the sound of her voice. Looking down at her, his face conveyed no emotion. At least not how he was really feeling. "What you did—um, helping the kids. That was... really cool." She said with a small smile.

Steve simply shrugged his shoulders, stepping up again to continue stapling. "Yeah. Those little shits are real trouble, you know?" He responded, avoiding eye contact with her.

"Believe me, I know." Nancy said, and Steve didn't see the way she looked at him. It was clear she felt sorry for hurting him.

Daisy had walked in at that exact moment, stopping quickly when she realized the two of them were in there together. "Oh—shit, sorry." She paused, ready to turn on her heel and walk out, fearing she had just walked in on a private conversation.

"No, it's okay." Nancy said, resigning herself to the fact that there wasn't going to *be* a conversation with Steve. Things were just too uncomfortable right now. "I'm gonna go check and see how they're

doing inside." She added, walking right past Daisy and out of the shed. Daisy watched her leave without a word, finally bringing herself to look back over at Steve once Nancy was out of sight.

"Hi." Daisy said, clearly feeling just as awkward as Steve had felt talking to Nancy. Steve stepped down, meeting her gaze and smiling an actual, genuine smile. He didn't know why—but she just seemed like a breath of fresh air in all this chaos. "Hey." He responded.

"You want some help?" She asked, pointing at the tarp that was still only half-attached to the wall. Steve nodded his head in response to her question, and Daisy moved over to hold up the other end of the tarp so that he could continue stapling.

They worked quietly for a few moments before Daisy spoke up again. "Are you okay? I mean, with..." She trailed off, looking over to the door that Nancy had just exited a few minutes prior. Steve could see the sincere concern on her face. Was it *that* obvious how crushed he really was? Or maybe she just picked up on it better than the others.

"Yeah... yeah, I'm good." He shrugged, hoping that sounded convincing enough. The knowing look on Daisy's face told him right away that it wasn't. "I guess you just can't expect things to last forever, you know?" He added solemnly, but he smiled (a rather sad smile) at her once more for reassurance. "I'll be okay, though."

"I know it sounds super cliché but... things happen for a reason. And maybe this just means you haven't met the right person yet... your *forever* person. But you will, eventually, and you'll look back on this and one day it won't hurt as bad." Daisy said, offering a reassuring smile of her own. She liked to think she was fairly good at giving advice. Back at her old school, her friends would always come to her when they were having issues of their own. She just had this very nurturing personality.

"I hope so." Steve responded. He had gradually moved closer to her as he put the staples in the wall, and now they were only a few inches apart from one another. Steve took a moment to take in her appearance. She still looked tired, her eyes had formed bags underneath due to the lack of sleep. Her clothes were dirty from walking through the woods and strands of her hair were hanging out

of her ponytail, but still she looked... pretty. It was the first time he actually had the chance to acknowledge that. She caught him staring, and Steve cleared his throat, averting his gaze upwards.

"Watch your hand." He instructed as he went to place the last staple into the upper corner. She did as he said, moving her hand so that he could get it in there. They both took a second to look at the finished product, before stepping down again. "Thanks, Daisy." Steve said.

She smiled again. "No problem." There was another wave of silence, but it was comfortable this time. It didn't last long, however, as the sounds of footsteps and voices approached the shed. The kids barged right in carrying more tarp, blankets, and duct tape to cover the rest of the walls in. Steve and Daisy both took a considerable step back from each other when they came in, and Daisy turned to start helping them, sparing one last smile at Steve. He returned it, and then got to work as well, but couldn't help the continuous glances in her direction every few minutes.

## 7. Chapter 7

**A/N: Hey there, readers! Sending out another quick thank you to everyone who has favorited, followed, and reviewed so far! So, the next chapter after this one will be the last one involving the events from the show, and from there it'll start with the aftermath of everything as well as the building of the relationship between Daisy and Steve. I hope you guys are excited! Enjoy!**

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It seemed like things were running at a mile a minute once the shed was all ready to go and Will was inside it. Joyce, Jonathan, Hopper, and Mike were all in there with him, while everyone else stayed inside the house, working on cracking the Morse code in which Will was communicating with. They had the walkie-talkie's set up so that Hopper could relay the codes to the group inside the house. Nancy sat at the table with a blank piece of paper and a pencil, scribbling down the letters as Lucas read them off to her.

Daisy stood by the table, looking down at the sheet of paper as Nancy wrote on it. Steve had ended up standing beside her, something that Daisy didn't think much of, but the look they received from Nancy was not lost on her. It wasn't a look of jealousy or anger... it was more of a subtle, knowing look. Daisy felt slightly confused, but pushed that feeling to the back burner for now in order to focus on the task at hand. All was going just fine... until the phone started to ring.

Dustin rushed over, picking up the phone and slamming it back into the receiver. It went quiet for a moment, but then began ringing again. Nancy got up this time, going over and ripping the entire unit out of the wall, slamming it on the ground. Finally, it stopped, but now they couldn't be sure if Will heard that or not. Their question didn't take long to be answered, however, when Jonathan ran into the house, carrying an unconscious Will. He was followed closely by Joyce, Hopper, and Mike, and he laid Will on the couch before turning to the rest of the group.

All of a sudden, the distant sound of the demodogs could be heard.



Everyone turned towards the window. "That can't be good." Dustin said, as the kids went over to the couch to stare out the window.

"They're coming." Jonathan told them, and everyone gathered in the living room. Hopper quickly scolded the kids to get away from the window. He turned to Jonathan, holding up a shotgun. "Can you use this?" Jonathan looked hesitant, clearly not confident in his ability to shoot a gun if need be. Nancy stepped forward, holding her hands out. "I can." She said, taking the shotgun and unlocking the safety.

Everyone else lined up; Hopper and Nancy aiming their guns, Steve holding his bat, Mike grabbing a blunt object, and Lucas readying his slingshot. Daisy placed herself in front of Dustin and Max, making sure they were safely shielded behind her. She felt a bit helpless without any type of weapon, but there wasn't much else she could do at this point.

The demodogs sounded *much* closer now – they had to have been right in the front yard. Daisy could feel her heart rate picking up as she prepared herself for them to burst into the house at any second. She didn't have a good feeling about this at all. Everyone stood, collectively holding their breath, when suddenly a demodog came crashing through the window. They all stood back to shield themselves from the spraying glass.

Before anyone could be on the attack, they noticed that the demodog wasn't moving. It laid on the floor, seemingly lifeless. Hopper slowly walked over, nudging the head with his boot. "It's dead." He spoke up, looking as confused as everyone else in the room. Suddenly, the latches on the door began to unlock completely on their own.

Everyone simultaneously turned towards the door, aiming their weapons once again. Daisy's eyes widened as the door pushed open by itself, and in walked a young girl with short, slicked-back hair and some heavy eye make-up. Looks of realization went around the room - all except for Daisy and Max. But once Daisy saw the look on Mike's face, she had a feeling this girl had to be Eleven, the one from last year, that Dustin had told her all about.

Her suspicions were confirmed when Mike and the girl shared a teary-eyed embrace, and everyone else visibly relaxed. Daisy stood

back as the rest of the group went over to greet her, watching as Mike and Hopper got into a confrontation before disappearing into another room to talk privately. She felt slightly out of place as everyone hugged the young girl, and as she looked over at Max, she could sense that the redhead was feeling the same way.

Dustin and Lucas shared a group hug with Eleven, expressing how much they had missed her. When they pulled apart, Eleven reached out, touching Dustin's teeth. "Teeth," She said, earning a slightly confused look from Dustin as he pulled away a bit. "You have teeth."

Dustin grinned, happy that she had noticed, before turning to look at Daisy and motioning her over. Daisy complied, moving over to where they were standing. "El, this is my sister, Daisy." Dustin introduced.

Daisy smiled, and El seemed to almost study her, before returning the smile with a small one of her own. "Pretty." The younger girl commented.

"Oh - thank you." Daisy said, caught a bit off guard by the compliment, but smiling nonetheless. "It's nice to finally meet you." She added.

Max came over just then, extending her hand to El. "Eleven? I'm Max. I've heard a lot about you." She smiled.

This time, Eleven's face became more serious. She didn't respond to Max, instead she walked right by her without even acknowledging the other girl. Clearly confused, Max watched Eleven walk away and hug Joyce, before turning back to Daisy, who shrugged her shoulders, just as confused as Max about the sudden cold attitude from El.

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They had come to the conclusion that what they needed to do to defeat the shadow monster was to close a gate that El had opened last year. What or where this gate was, Daisy had no idea. And she was even more unsure of just how El was going to close it. From the way Hopper talked about it, it didn't seem like it was going to be an easy or safe job, but the young girl insisted that she could do it.

They knew they had to bring Will to somewhere that he didn't know

in order to get the "virus" out of him. Hopper had instructed Jonathan and Joyce to bring him to where he lived, while he and Eleven were going to the lab to deal with the gate problem. That left Daisy, Steve, Nancy, and the rest of the kids to stay at the Byers' house to wait things out. Quite honestly, Daisy was okay with that decision; she didn't know how much more she could handle for the night.

Joyce had come to the realization that they were going to have to burn the virus out of Will. So the rest of the group went about looking for anything they could find that would emit enough heat to get the monster out of Will. Steve stood out in the backyard, shining a flashlight onto the pile of items Hopper had thrown out of the shed earlier.

Nancy was on the other side of the pile, rummaging through it as well. They both were silent, seemingly unsure of what to even say to one another. Steve looked over at her for a good few seconds, almost contemplating what he was about to say, before finally allowing the words to leave his mouth. "You should go with him."

"Huh?" Nancy looked up, confusion washing over her face.

"Jonathon." Steve clarified, moving his gaze back down to the pile. "You should go with him."

It hurt him to say it. It hurt to know that *this* - this was him letting her go. He knew he had lost her a while ago, and now it was time to come to terms with it. She wanted Jonathon, whether she admitted it to him or not. He could *see* it. And maybe what Daisy had told him earlier was true - maybe Nancy wasn't *the one*. But that didn't mean that he'd never find the right person eventually.

"No," Nancy responded, breaking Steve away from his thoughts. "I'm not just gonna leave Mike."

"No one's leaving anyone." He told her, leaning down to pick up a space heater off the ground. That would do. Looking over at Nancy again, he offered a smile. "I may be a shitty boyfriend, but... turns out I'm a pretty damn good babysitter."

Nancy didn't say anything. She looked up at him, sadness apparent in

her eyes. Not necessarily sadness that their relationship was over - it was more like she was sad that she had hurt him.

"It's okay, Nance. Really." Steve assured her. He told himself that this is what needed to be done. Continuing to try and make their relationship work was a lost cause. Nancy looked towards the house, where she could see Jonathan inside getting ready to leave.

"I am sorry, Steve." Nancy said quietly. and he could hear the sincerity in her voice. At least that gave him *some* form of comfort, knowing that they wouldn't be ending things on such bad terms.

"I know." He responded, handing her the heater in his hand so that she could bring it with her. He motioned for her to head inside before they left without her, watching as she disappeared inside the house without another word.

He followed inside shortly after, an odd sense of relaxation coming over him. Now that everyone else was off to their destinations and it was just him, Daisy and the kids, he felt as though he finally had a moment to just *breathe*.

Lucas and Max were in the living room, sweeping up the shattered glass on the floor from the windows, while Daisy helped as well, tidying up as best as she could. Dustin called Steve over, pointing to the dead demodog that was on the floor, now wrapped in a quilt. "What are you-" Steve began to ask, but Dustin interrupted. "Just bring it into the kitchen."

Steve reluctantly picked the creature up, following Dustin into the kitchen where he was the entire contents of the refrigerator on the floor. Dustin pointed into the empty fridge. "Put it in there."

"Is this really necessary?" Steve asked, arching his eyebrows.

"Yes. This is a ground-breaking scientific discovery, we can't just bury it like it's some common mammal." Dustin said, sounding offended that Steve would even *ask* that.

"Alright, alright." Steve finally gave in, moving forward to try and fit it into the fridge. "But you're explaining this to Mrs. Byers."

Mike was pacing back and forth in the living room, worrying himself sick over Eleven's safety. Daisy watched him as she continued picking things up off the floor, realizing that anything she could try and say to calm him down would probably be of no use. Lucas stopped sweeping when he noticed the pacing as well, giving Mike a look. "Mike, would you just stop already?"

"You weren't *in* there, okay Lucas? That lab is swarming with hundreds of those dogs." Mike shot back, obviously frustrated.

"Demodogs!" Dustin yelled from the kitchen.

"The chief will take care of her." Lucas tried to reason with Mike, but even Max was skeptical about that when she chimed in. "She needs protection."

"Listen," Steve said, stepping into the living room now as well. "If a coach calls a play in a game, bottom line, you execute it."

Mike didn't look convinced at Steve's analogy. "First of all, this isn't a stupid sports game and second, we're not even in the game, we're on the bench."

"Righ- so my *point* is..." Steve quickly tried to think of something to convince the kids, as everyone stared at him expectantly. "Right, yeah- we're on the bench, so uh... there's nothing we can do."

"That's not entirely true." Dustin spoke up, coming to stand beside Steve. "These demodogs have a hive-mind. When they ran away from the bus, they were called away."

"So if we can get their attention..." Lucas started. Daisy stepped forward now, knowing that the kids were going to cook up some kind of plan, and she wasn't sure that was the safest thing to be doing right now.

"Maybe we can draw them away from the lab." Max finished Lucas' thought for him.

"And clear a path to the gate." Mike added, realization hitting him.

"Yeah, and then *we all die*." Steve exclaimed, clearly insinuating that

he was not on board with this idea at all. Daisy nodded her head in agreement. "Yeah, guys, I think we should just stay here and wait until we hear from them."

The kids seemed to ignore her advice, as Mike quickly led everyone into the other room, pointing to an 'X' that was written on a section of Will's elaborate drawings. "This is where the chief dug his hole. This is our way into the tunnels." He said, heading back to the living room, everyone else right on his heels.

"And right here," He came to the center of the drawing. "This is like a hub. All the tunnels feed into here. Maybe if we set this on fire-"

"That's a *no*." Steve quickly dismissed.

The kids continued to ignore him as Dustin spoke up now. "Then the Mind Flayer would call away his army."

"Then we circle back to the exit." Mike said. "By the time they realize we're gone-"

"El would be at the gate." Max finished for him.

"Hey, hey, hey!" Steve exclaimed, clapping his hands together to get their attention. They all finally stopped talking, looking over at him. "This is not happening."

"But-" Mike started to protest, but Steve immediately stopped him. "No buts. I promised I'd keep you shitheads safe, and that's exactly what I plan on doing."

The kids collectively looked over at Daisy, hopeful looks on their faces that she would try to convince Steve to go along with their idea. Unfortunately for them, Daisy didn't think it was a good idea either. "Guys, I think Steve's right. Our safest bet is to stay here."

Steve nodded his head in agreement, glad that they were a united front on this. "We're staying here, on the bench, and we're waiting for the starting team to do their job. Does everybody understand that?" He asked, only earning a round of eye rolls from the kids. "I said, does everybody understand? I need a 'yes.'"

Before any of them had the chance to answer, the sound of a revving car engine caught everyone's attention. Max seemed to recognize the sound, hurrying over to the window, a horrified look on her face. "It's my brother." She said, looking back to everyone. "He can't know I'm here. He'll kill me. He'll kill *us*."

Daisy looked over at Steve, not sure what to do about this unexpected situation. Steve's eyes met hers, then he looked to the kids, a sudden urge to protect coming over him. "I'll handle it." He told them, walking to the front door and outside.

All four kids immediately rushed to the window, kneeling on the couch to look outside. Daisy quickly moved over there as well, motioning for the kids to stay down. She couldn't help but peek out the window as well, though, to keep an eye on the confrontation. She didn't realize until now that Max was Billy Hargrove's sister.

Their conversation seemed to be going fine, until Billy pointed to the window that the kids were looking out of, his eye's meeting Max's. The kids immediately dropped from the window. "*Shit*. Did he see us?" Dustin asked.

Daisy glanced out the window again just in time to see Billy shove Steve to the ground and give him a swift kick to the stomach. Her eyes widened and she motioned for the kids to move closer to her, just as Billy swung the door open. "Well, well, well." He said, stepping into the house and slamming the door shut behind him.

His eyes landed on Daisy, and for a split second he looked to be confused as to why she was there, but the confusion almost instantly turned to rage when he set his eyes on Lucas. "Lucas Sinclair." He said, walking up to the younger boy. He looked down at Max, who was standing beside him. "I thought I told you to stay away from him, Max?"

"Billy, go away." Max said, and Daisy could see the fear in her eyes.

"You disobeyed me. And you know what happens when you disobey me - I break things." Billy grabbed Lucas by his jacket, forcefully shoving him up against the wall. The kids all started yelling, and Daisy stood there, stunned for a few seconds. Was this actually

happening right now?

She snapped out of it as a rush of fierce protectiveness came over her. Without thinking, Daisy quickly came up behind Billy, reaching out and grabbing two handfuls of his hair and yanking back, distracting him long enough for Lucas to knee him square in the groin. He stumbled back a few steps, staring menacingly at Daisy, before turning back to Lucas again. "You are so dead, Sinclair."

"No," Steve suddenly reappeared inside the house, stepping in front of Daisy. "You are." He said, before landing a punch to Billy's face. Daisy knew this was about to get ugly. She put a hand on Lucas' shoulder and led him back over to where the rest of the kids were standing. She placed herself protectively in front of them as the two boys went at it, throwing punches left and right.

"Kick his ass, Steve! Get him!" The kids yelled, and Daisy shushed them, not wanting them to encourage any more fighting than was already happening between the two.

She gasped as Billy smashed a plate over Steve's head, her hand coming up to cover her mouth. This was getting more dangerous by the second, and she didn't know what to do. Getting in between their fist fight was a risky move, and she knew she had to keep the kids out of harm's way.

The fight only seemed to intensify as Billy threw Steve to the ground. The kids screamed for him to stop, while he got on top of a helpless Steve, and began punching him in the face over and over again. It was clear that Steve was knocked out by this point, blood spraying from his nose with each hit. Tears sprang to Daisy's eyes as she too yelled for Billy to stop what he was doing.

But he didn't stop. It seemed like time was moving in slow motion. Daisy didn't know how to stop this - she felt helpless. From the corner of her eye she saw Max stepping forward and before she could even process what was in her hand, Max stabbed a syringe into Billy's neck, injecting him with Will's sedatives. Billy finally stopped punching Steve, standing up as he pulled the syringe out of his neck. "What the hell did you do?"



He stumbled a bit, before finally falling onto the floor with a thud. As soon as Daisy was sure he was down and out, she rushed over to where Steve was, kneeling beside him. "Shit." She muttered, more tears welling up in her eyes at the sight of his face. She wiped some excess blood away with the sleeve of her sweater, gently tapping the side of his face to see if he'd wake up.

She vaguely heard Max say something about getting out of there, and she peered over her shoulder to see the redhead holding up the keys to Billy's car. "Whoa, wait a minute." Daisy stood up, turning to face them.

"I've driven his car before, I promise." Max said. Daisy didn't know if it was the fact that she was so tired, or so out of it from what she'd just witnessed (or both) but she nodded her head. She certainly wasn't in her best state of mind at the moment. She had the kids help her (struggle) to carry an unconscious Steve out to the car, leaving Billy on the floor where he laid.

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Steve's eyes slowly opened, a groan escaping his lips. He didn't know where he was, but judging by the motion he could feel, he could only assume he was in a car. Everything looked blurry, he felt like he couldn't breathe out of his nose. What happened? Where was he? He looked to his left and saw a familiar face, but couldn't quite make out who it was. The features looked unmistakable, and finally he opened his mouth to speak. "Nancy...?" He mumbled. The person gave him an odd look, and the more he focused in, he realized that it wasn't Nancy... it was her brother.

His whole face ached. It was then that he finally remembered what happened. Billy Hargrove had clearly gotten the better of him... not that Steve had a particularly good track record with fist fights. Groaning out again in pain, he shifted a little, only to realize he was half on the backseat of the car, half on the floor. Looking up, he locked eyes with Daisy, whose lap he was half laying in. She had her arms securely around him so that he remained where he was, and when she realized he was awake, she smiled down at him.

She looked so beautiful. Steve could have sworn she was an angel looking down on him. Her hair dangled so close to his swollen face,

he could smell her shampoo. Lavender. He was sure he'd never smelt anything nicer.

"Hey... you're awake." She said quietly, her hand gently brushing some stray hairs out of his face. His own hand came up, about to touch his face when someone else stopped him.

"No, don't touch it." It was Dustin's voice this time. "It's okay buddy. You put up a good fight. He kicked your ass, but you put up a good fight."

Steve was finally starting to come to, his vision becoming clearer. He looked up at Daisy again, finding a sort of comfort in seeing her there. But then he was hit with a realization; if the only two people old enough to be driving a car were both in the backseat... then who was driving?

He peered up front, seeing a flash of red hair from the driver's seat and felt his stomach drop. "Oh, God..." He said, trying to sit up.

"Don't worry, she's driven before." Dustin assured him.

"Yeah, in a parking lot." Mike countered.

"That counts!" Lucas piped up from the front seat.

"Stop the car!" Steve said, struggling now to sit himself upright. The speed of the car only increased, making him feel sick.

"I told you he'd freak out." Mike exclaimed, shaking his head.

"Everyone shut up, I'm trying to focus!" Max yelled from the driver's seat, speeding up the car again.

"This left! Max, take this left!" Lucas shouted over everyone else, as Max skidded into the left turn, taking out a mailbox in the process. Daisy's grip tightened around Steve as the car accelerated, everyone in the car yelling as it came speeding down a hill and came to a screeching halt.

The kids began piling out of the car, going to the trunk to get supplies. Steve stumbled out, with the help of Daisy, yelling at the

kids all the while. "Hey! Where do you think you're going? I told you we're *not* going down there, I made myself clear!"

"Steve!" Dustin shouted, stopping his rampage. "You're upset, I get it. But the bottom line is, a party member requires assistance, and it is our duty to provide that assistance. Now I know you promised to keep us safe," He said, handing Steve his backpack and bat. "So *keep us safe.*"

Steve sighed, giving in without much of a choice. Those kids were going down into the tunnels whether he said yes or no, and he wasn't about to let them go down there on their own. His eyes found Daisy, and she looked at him with an apologetic expression.

"I'm sorry," She said, moving over to where he was standing. "They were very adamant about this."

He shook his head, feeling it throb as he did so. "No, it's okay. I understand."

She frowned, slowly reaching up to let her fingertips graze along his cheek. "How's your face?" She asked.

Steve let out a short laugh. "How does it look?"

Daisy paused a moment, not quite sure how she should answer that question. "Like you got the crap beat out of you." She answered honestly, surprised that she actually got a smile out of him with that. Well, as much of a smile as he could muster.

"About earlier – the fighting... that's not me. I mean, I don't usually do that kind of stuff." He started to say, but Daisy quickly shook her head. "You were trying to protect them. I get it. You don't have to explain anything to me." She smiled softly.

Before he could say anything else, the kids called over to them, waving from where they were standing by the hole. "Are you guys coming or what?" Dustin shouted.

Steve looked back at Daisy, who seemed hesitant to want to go down into the tunnels. "It'll be alright. I'll be right here." He assured her.

She nodded her head, starting to walk over towards the kids alongside Steve. "Let's just get this over with."

## 8. Chapter 8

**A/N: Hey, everyone! Welcome back, and a huge thank you to you all for your continued support and interest! I really enjoyed writing this chapter, so I hope you guys like it!**

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One by one, Daisy, Steve, and the kids all hopped down into the hole leading to the tunnels underground. Daisy took a moment to survey the area. It was dark, difficult to see with all the particles floating around in the air. They all had goggles on to protect their eyes and bandannas covering the rest of their faces. According to Dustin, the air down there was dangerous to breathe in. Vines covered the ground, threatening to trip or tangle them up as they ventured through the tunnels.

Mike had the map, about to lead the way, but Steve was quick to stop him where he was. "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Any of you shitheads get hurt, and *I'm* getting the blame, you hear me? I'll take the lead." He said, snatching the map from Mike. Daisy stayed at the back of the group, allowing the kids to take up the middle so that none of them would get lost or left behind. She wasn't exactly sure where the hub of the tunnels was, but she hoped it was going to be a quick and easy mission.

It wasn't simple navigating through the tunnels, that was for sure, between the low visibility and all the dips and divots in the ground. Dustin had slowed down, something above him catching his eye. It had caused Daisy to stop as well, as she placed a hand on his shoulder as a way to keep him moving. The last thing she wanted was for them to get separated from the group.

Whatever it was that was above Dustin forcefully spit out a blast of what looked to be the same type of particles floating around in the air, right into Dustin's face. He let out a shriek, falling to the ground, and Daisy was right there beside him in an instant. Dustin's yelling continued, causing the rest of the group to take notice and rush back to where they were.

"Dustin! Are you okay?" Daisy frantically asked, trying to get him to

look at her, but he was too busy throwing a fit. "It got in my mouth!" He shouted, continuing his shrieking as Daisy tried desperately to shush him. She worried that all the noise he was making would attract the demodogs to where they were, and that would certainly throw a wrench in their plan.

Finally, Dustin's shrieking came to an end, breathing heavily as he looked up at the rest of the group. "I'm okay." He said, after finally realizing that nothing had *actually* gotten in his mouth. Daisy sighed, shaking her head as she pulled him up off the ground and gave him a gentle push to get him to start walking again.

They traveled for a bit more, but it didn't take them long to find what they were looking for. They stopped when they got to what looked like the center where all the different tunnels lead branched off from. Daisy peered around, amazed (and a bit frightened) that this elaborate tunnel system had been existing right below them this entire time. It amazed her even more that this had all been undiscovered until now.

"I think we found your hub, Wheeler." Steve said, shining his flashlight out into the opening. Mike stepped forward, nodding his head in agreement. "Let's drench it." He stated.

They all got to work, pouring gasoline over every inch of the hub. The smell of the gasoline in such close proximity made Daisy feel a little woozy, so she worked quickly in order to get out of there faster. Each little noise that she heard was enough to make her jump, fearing that the demodogs would be one step ahead of them and make an ambush. Once they had emptied all the canisters that they had, and they were sure all of the hub was drenched in gasoline, everyone gathered at one of the openings.

Steve grabbed the lighter from his pocket, flicking it open. He looked back at everyone, making sure they were all behind him. "You guys ready?" He asked, earning a collective nod from the others. "Light her up." Dustin said from beside him.

Taking a deep breath, Steve ignited the lighter, swiftly tossing it into the middle of the hub. In an instant, it burst into rapid flames. The vines seemed to come to life, hissing and flailing as the fire consumed

them. No sooner than the word "Go!" left Steve's mouth, everyone was on their feet and running in the opposite direction of the flames, back the way they had come from. Once again, Steve took the lead and Daisy stayed at the back of the group in order to keep an eye on all of the kids.

They rounded a corner and Daisy could hear Steve up ahead yelling that the entrance was that way. Mike was right in front of her when he tripped, falling to the ground. A vine instantly wrapped itself around his ankle, rooting him to the spot. Daisy knelt beside him, trying her hardest to untangle his leg, but the vine only tightened its grip. "Shit." She muttered, desperately clawing at it in another failed attempt to free the younger boy. "Steve!" She finally shouted, as Mike continued to yell for help.

Steve and the rest of the kids turned back, rushing over to the two of them. "Everybody back!" Steve yelled, coming over with his bat. Daisy quickly scrambled out of the way just as Steve began whacking the vine with the nail-riddled bat. It took three hits before the vine finally snapped, freeing Mike. Daisy helped him up off the ground as he gave her an appreciative look.

"Alright, let's get—" Daisy began to say, but was interrupted by a loud, all too familiar, growling sound. Everyone jumped, whirling around to come face-to-face with one of the demodogs.

"Dart?" Dustin stepped forward. Daisy's eyes widened as she scolded Dustin to get back, along with the rest of the group. She was about to reach out and pull him back by his sweatshirt, but he held a hand up to quiet everyone else. "Just trust me. Please?"

Daisy didn't like this at all. She didn't know *what* Dustin was thinking, and she had a bad feeling in the pit of her stomach. She watched, horrified, as Dustin moved forward again, lifting his goggles and removing the bandanna from his face momentarily. "Hey, it's me. It's Dustin. You remember me?" He talked gently to Dart as if he were a pet. "Will you let us pass?"

Clearly not liking that question, Dart's entire face opened up, exposing *many* sharp teeth and another loud growl. Daisy could have sworn she felt her heart drop into her stomach. Dustin didn't seem

phased, though, as he just smiled at Dart. "Sorry about the storm cellar. I know it was a pretty douchey thing to do. Hey, are you hungry?" He asked, reaching back to pull his backpack off his shoulder.

He pulled out a Three Musketeer's bar, opening the wrapper and placing it on the ground in front of Dart. "I've got our favorite. Nougat." He smiled again as Dart began eating the candy bar. Daisy watched in amazement at how Dustin had handled the situation. She had definitely underestimated him. With Dart being distracted enough, Dustin waved over his shoulder, motioning for everyone to pass. They all wasted no time, scooting by Dart as quietly as possible.

Daisy waited for Dustin to join them, watching as he stood up again, putting his backpack over his shoulders once more. Dart lifted his head to look at them one last time, before heading off in the opposite direction, letting them go safely. Daisy breathed a sigh of relief, putting her hand on Dustin's shoulder to guide him in front of her again so that they could finally get out of these tunnels.

At last, after what seemed like an eternity, they could see the rope hanging from the entrance just up ahead. They rushed up to it, Daisy and Steve helping to hoist the kids up one by one so that they could climb out. Max went first, then Lucas, followed by Mike. Just as they were about to help Dustin up, the sound of a stampede could be heard coming towards them. The three of them turned just in time to see a pack of demodogs racing right in their direction.

Daisy could have sworn she saw her life flash before her eyes. This had to be it. They were running *right* towards them; there was no way they were getting out of this now. Daisy wrapped her arms around Dustin, pulling him close to her. She could hear the other kids up above yelling for them to get out of there. She felt Steve's arms come around her, bringing both her and Dustin against him as the demodogs closed in on them.

Daisy closed her eyes tightly, bracing herself for the worst. She waited for the sharp, piercing bites... but they never came. The demodogs ran straight past them, completely unphased by their presence, and continued on down the tunnels. Daisy slowly opened her eyes, letting out the breath she had been holding in. *What* just



happened? Why didn't the demodogs attack?

Steve, realizing suddenly that he still had his arms wrapped around Daisy, let go once he was sure the threat of danger was gone. Daisy did the same to Dustin, releasing her iron-like grip from around him. He stared off in the direction the pack had went in, mouth open in realization. "El is at the gate." He confirmed, looking over to Steve and Daisy. "She must be closing it."

"Yeah, well, let's get out of here before anything else comes along." Daisy said. She and Steve helped Dustin climb out, and then Steve motioned for her to go next. "I got you. Go ahead." He said, moving to wrap his arms around her waist, lifting her up with ease. She grabbed on to the rope, pulling herself up the rest of the way to join the kids. Steve was able to pull himself up out of the hole, but Daisy still offered her hand to him for assistance.

By the time they were all above ground again, the headlights on the car were shining so brightly that everyone had to shield their eyes. According to Mike, that had to have meant that El had closed the gate, or was fairly close to it. Daisy could feel herself relax considerably after hearing that, knowing that all of this was just about over.

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The ride back to the Byers' house was quiet for the most part. The kids, all crammed in the backseat, were close to falling asleep. Daisy could feel herself wanting to nod off as well, but she did her best to keep her eyes open, focusing on the passing streetlights. She had offered to drive, but Steve insisted he could do it. She couldn't imagine how he was feeling in that moment. His face still looked to be in a lot of pain, and she could tell he was exhausted – not that they all weren't.

"I'm glad this is all over." Daisy broke the silence, her voice coming out groggy. Steve peered over at her briefly, nodding in agreement. He felt like he could probably sleep for a few *days* after all of this. He was rather impressed by Daisy, though. She handled everything so well, considering she hadn't been a part of what happened last year. She took it all in stride. "You doing okay?" He turned to look at her once again for a moment before turning his gaze back on the road.

"Yeah, I'm okay." Daisy responded, allowing a small smile to cross her lips. She went quiet again for a few moments and light snores could be heard from the backseat. From the corner of his eye, Steve could see that Daisy was looking in his direction again. "I just wanted to say thank you." She said. "You've been such a huge help. I know Dustin and I kind of... dragged you into this, but I do really appreciate it."

Steve was truthfully a bit surprised that she was thanking him. He didn't really think he deserved to be thanked – he was just doing what he knew was the right thing to do. But he smiled at her nonetheless, a warm feeling coming over him when they met each others' gaze again. "You don't have to thank me, Daisy." He told her. "I was happy to help."

A comfortable silence fell over them again after that, until they arrived at the Byers' house. Jonathan's car was in the driveway again which meant that he, Will, Joyce, and Nancy were back. Steve and Daisy carefully woke the kids, informing them that they were back as they all tiredly piled out of the car, groaning and mumbling their protests.

As they entered the house and saw a very confused Joyce standing over Billy, who was still knocked out thanks to the sedatives, Daisy realized she had completely forgotten they had left him there. Now they were *somehow* going to have to get him home – with any luck, before he woke up.

Mike barged past everyone and into the house, looking around. "Where's El? Did she do it? Did she close the gate?" He asked frantically. Joyce turned her attention to the young boy, smiling a relieved smile. "She did it. They're headed home now. You guys should do so too. It's getting late."

Daisy was in full agreement with that. She could practically hear her bed calling her name. "Is Will okay?" She asked, realizing she hadn't seen the young boy since they had walked in the house. Joyce nodded her head, and Daisy noted that she looked much more relaxed now than she did earlier. "He's okay. Fast asleep, actually. But he's finally okay."

Joyce looked back down at Billy, then back over at them, as if asking

for some kind of explanation. Daisy offered a sheepish expression, looking to Steve for a moment, and then back to Joyce. "Uh- he's fine. Just a little... mishap with the sedatives. We'll bring him home." Daisy said, stepping forward and leaning down in an attempt to pull him up, which proved more difficult than she thought. Steve was by her side in a moment, helping her pull an unconscious Billy up off the floor.

Joyce went over to the door to hold it open for them. "Jonathan has to give Nancy a ride home. I'll have him take Mike and Lucas too." She said, looking towards the boys, who nodded and went over to sit on the couch to wait. "Thank you." Daisy smiled at the older woman, struggling to support Billy's weight even with Steve's help.

They finally made it out to the car, slumping Billy into the backseat with Max and Dustin. He was vaguely starting to become more aware, mumbling nonsense and drifting back and forth between sleep and consciousness. Daisy just hoped they would be able to make it back to his house before he woke up fully.

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They had made a quick pit-stop along the way, picking up Steve's car from where it was still parked by the train tracks. Daisy then drove Billy's car the rest of the way back to his house with Max, while Steve and Dustin followed behind in his car. Max pointed out the passenger's side window at one of the upcoming houses. "It's this one on the right." She said. Daisy nodded, slowing the car and pulling into the driveway.

"How are we going to get him in there without my mom and stepdad seeing?" Max asked, peering briefly at Billy, still slumped in the backseat, then back at Daisy. Daisy turned the car off, the headlights flicking off and leaving them in darkness. "I've got an idea. Just play along." She assured Max as the two got out of the car and went around to the backseat to get Billy.

She looked over to Steve, who had pulled in the driveway right after she had, and motioned for him and Dustin to wait there. This would hopefully only take a few minutes. Daisy and Max struggled up the front steps while trying to support Billy's weight at the same time. Once they got up to the front door, Daisy reached out to knock

lightly on it a couple times.

It took a few seconds, but the sound of someone from inside the house coming to answer the door could be heard. The door opened, and an older man who Daisy could only assume was Billy's father looked down upon them, confusion written all over his face. "Mr. Hargrove? Hi, I'm Daisy." She said, and before she could continue, a redheaded woman who Max bore a striking resemblance to, came to the door. A breath of relief escaped her lips when she saw Max.

"Oh my goodness, Maxine. Where have you been?" She asked, just now noticing Daisy standing there as well. She looked between them (and Billy, still semi-conscious and leaning against Daisy) with a confused expression of her own. Max looked up at Daisy as well, allowing her to answer as she was told to just play along.

"Um... well, see, Max and my little brother Dustin were at the arcade earlier today... and I ended up picking them up, and we all went back to my house. And, you know, we kind of just got carried away watching movies and stuff. I apologize, I know you guys must have been worried sick. We just lost track of time, I guess." Daisy explained, hoping she was coming across convincing enough. Judging by the looks on their faces, they were buying it so far.

"And then, uh- Billy here, he came looking for Max, but... when he got to my house he was... *pretty* drunk. And so, he eventually passed out and I drove his car back here." She continued, seeing Max nodding her head along with the story out of the corner of her eye.

"Anyway, I'm sorry again for causing any worry." Daisy said, offering an apologetic smile. Max's mother stepped forward, wrapping her arm around Max's shoulders. "We're just glad they're okay." She said, looking over to Daisy appreciatively. "Thank you so much."

Daisy forced a convincing smile, glancing between both adults. Billy's father appeared far less thankful and a bit more agitated the more he looked at his son. She did feel only slightly sorry for lying, but they couldn't very well tell them what *really* happened. And she reminded herself that she didn't owe Billy Hargrove any favors after what he'd done. She just hoped that he wouldn't remember what truly happened.

"Do you have a way to get back home?" Billy's father finally spoke up, stepping out of the door fully and taking his supposedly incapacitated son's arm and slinging it over his shoulder, relieving Daisy of having to stand there and struggle to hold him upright. Daisy nodded. "Oh—yes, a friend of mine followed me here." She answered, taking a step back. "Have a good night. Sorry again for all of this." She spoke as she began retreating down the steps. Max smiled and waved at her before disappearing inside the house behind Billy and his father. "Get home safe, sweetie." Max's mother called from the front porch, closing the door behind her after going back inside as well.

She got back to Steve's car, sliding into the front seat. "How'd it go?" He asked her.

"Surprisingly better than I thought." She answered with a short laugh. "I just told them he had a little too much to drink."

The ride back to her and Dustin's house didn't take all too long. All the lights inside the house were off which meant that their mother was most likely sleeping. Daisy briefly wondered if she even *realized* they had been gone for so long, or if she was still too preoccupied looking for the cat.

Dustin mumbled a sleepy "goodnight" to Steve as he got out of the backseat and made his way up towards the house. Daisy reached for her door handle, but paused for a moment, looking over in Steve's direction. "Thanks again for everything, Steve. I'll see you around?"

Steve smiled at her, suddenly not wanting her to leave. But he reminded himself that it was late, they had just been through a lot in the past 48 or so hours, and that he definitely needed some rest too. "Yeah, absolutely. I'll see you around. Goodnight, Daisy."

She returned his smile with a tired one of her own, that made him feel like he had butterflies in his stomach. "Goodnight, Steve." She said, finally making her way out of the car. Steve watched as she headed up the front steps and reached the door, turning back one last time to wave at him before disappearing inside.

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One night's sleep just wasn't quite enough for Daisy to feel refreshed.

She hadn't wanted to go to school the next day – preferring much more to catch up on sleep – but she was there nonetheless. One thing she noticed, though, as she roamed the halls between classes, was that Steve was nowhere to be seen. She found herself keeping an eye out for that particular mane of hair of his, but she was ultimately unsuccessful. Maybe he had the same idea she did about staying home – but he actually went through with it.

As she stood at her locker, grabbing her books for fourth period science class, someone approached her from behind, stopping just a foot or two away from her. "Well, well. Look who it is."

Daisy froze, her hand lingering on top of her science textbook as she could feel her heart rate increase a bit. Turning around finally, she came face to face with Billy. There was a bruise on the side of his neck from where Max had gotten him with the needle, that strongly resembled something like a hickey, which she was sure that's what he was passing it off as. She could see another bruise forming over his left cheek as well, which she didn't remember seeing the night before. She guessed it had to have been from when he and Steve fist fought.

"What do you want?" Daisy asked, trying to sound angry or annoyed but she was sure that he could pick up on the nervousness in her voice. Billy simply smirked that ever so smug smirk of his, taking another step towards her. "Oh, me? I just wanted to thank you for driving me home last night. Y'know, since I was too *drunk* to do it myself." His words were dripping with sarcasm. She now knew that *he* knew she had lied to his parents about what had happened.

When she said nothing in response, it only seemed to encourage his taunting more. "Where's your boyfriend today, huh? Too afraid to come out in public after what I did to his pretty face?"

Daisy scowled at him. "He's not my boy—" She stopped herself short, shaking her head. She didn't need to explain herself to him. He was only trying to get a rise out of her and she knew that. But it was so hard not to let him get under her skin. She hated that was able to do that so easily.

"Just leave me alone, will you?" She said, turning back to grab her science book out of her locker, closing it and then facing him again.

His eyes moved down to the book in her hands, another smirk coming across his lips.

"Leave you alone? Now where's the fun in that?" He responded, meeting her gaze again. He pointed to the textbook, turning on his heel to start walking away, but not before calling back out to her one last time. "See you in Mr. Davidson's class. I'll save you a seat right next to me."

Daisy stood there, seemingly rooted to the spot, as she watched him head down the hallway and into the same classroom that she was supposed to be going to next. How had she not realized they were in the same science class before now? *Great*. She knew she should have just stayed home today.

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Luckily the rest of the school day went by rather quickly, with minimal encounters with Billy after the one in the hallway. Every so often during science class, Daisy would catch him looking at her and smirking, doing it on purpose just to get a reaction out of her. She did her best to ignore him, and after the bell rang to signal classes were over, she nearly bolted out the door. She didn't like that she was on Billy Hargrove's radar now. She was sure he was going to do everything in his power to make her uncomfortable.

After school was over, Daisy found herself driving right past her house and in the direction she remembered Steve's house to be in. She hoped he wouldn't mind her dropping by unexpectedly, but she was rather worried about him after not seeing him at all that day.

She pulled up to the driveway, seeing his car parked there. She assumed his parents must have been working, because it was only his car in the driveway. Shutting her car off and stepping out, she let out a breath as she walked up to the front door. Reaching out, she knocked a few times, and then stepped back to wait. A few moments later, the door slowly opened. Steve's expression was one of pleasant surprise as his eyes landed on her. "Daisy. Hey." He greeted.

His face looked better today. Much less red and swollen, but still some prominent bruising around his nose. Daisy smiled softly. "Hey. I, um... came to see how you were doing. I didn't see you at all at

school today and I got a little worried."

Steve wasn't sure why, but hearing that she was worried about him filled him with a warm feeling. He couldn't deny that he had thought about her most of the day as well, hoping that she was doing okay. Once he realized they were still standing on opposite sides of the doorway, Steve moved back a step, offering her space to come inside. "You can come in if you want."

Daisy accepted the offer, stepping inside and taking a moment to look around. As nice as the house looked on the outside, it was even nicer inside. She turned her attention back to Steve after a couple more seconds of admiring. "Your house is... really nice. Is it just you and your parents who live here?" She asked. Steve nodded his head. "Yeah, but my dad is away on business a lot, and my mom usually goes with him so... most of the time it's just me here."

Daisy raised her eyebrows, unsure of how she'd feel all alone in a house as big as this one. Steve led her into the living room, taking a seat on the couch and patting the empty spot beside him for her to sit. She did so as well, sitting down and crossing one leg over the other and folding her hands in her lap. "How are you feeling today?" She asked, peering over at him.

Steve considered her question for a moment, shrugging his shoulders. "I'm okay. I guess my ego just needed a day to recover. I know, it's kind of stupid. But I'm sure Hargrove is going around bragging out the fight."

Daisy nodded, knowing first hand that Billy was taking pride in the fact that he'd gotten the better of Steve in a fight. But she didn't think it was stupid of Steve to stay home. She understood him not wanting everyone at school to see him with a face full of bruises. "Yeah, I had an... encounter with Billy today. He's such a jerk." She scoffed, shaking her head at the thought of him.

Steve suddenly sat up a bit straighter, his demeanor becoming much more... territorial, it seemed. "He wasn't harassing you or anything, was he?" He asked, all of a sudden regretting skipping school today. The last thing he wanted was for Billy to take the issues he had with Steve out on Daisy. She had nothing to do with the stupid rivalry that



existed between them... more so on Billy's part than Steve's.

"No... I mean, he was just being all arrogant and smug... you know, how he usually is, I guess. I think I handled it, though." Daisy said, not wanting to fuel any more fire between the two boys. They already had their problems with each other and she certainly didn't want to add to it, for Steve's sake at least. He visibly relaxed a bit, but still felt a zing of anger every time he thought about Billy messing with her.

"How did you sleep last night?" He asked, deciding it best to change the subject off of Billy. Truthfully, Daisy didn't sleep well at all. She tossed and turned most of the night, finding it difficult to get her mind to stop racing about everything that had transpired. By the time she had finally fallen asleep, her alarm went off about two hours later.

"Not so great, but I'm sure that was to be expected." She answered quietly. Steve knew what she meant about that. He could remember how hard it was to get back to some kind of normalcy after the events of last year. This time around it was slightly easier for him because he had dealt with it before, but he was sure it was going to be hard for her for a little while.

"I know everyone says this, but it does get better. And I'm here, if you ever need anything." Steve reassured her with a smile. She returned it, instinctively reaching out and placing her hand on top of his before she even realized what she was doing. When he didn't make any move to pull his hand away, she assumed that it was okay and gave it a quick, gentle squeeze. "Thank you. And I'm here for you too, just so you know. Whenever."

Their hands remained connected to one another for a few more moments as silence fell over the two of them. Daisy could feel herself getting lost in his comforting gaze, a feeling she didn't quite recognize washing over her. She looked down at their hands, pulling her back slowly and hesitantly, as if she didn't want to break contact with him.

Finally, she broke the silence, clearing her throat. "I should probably get going. I've got homework and then I need to pick Dustin up from

the arcade." She said, moving to stand up. Steve did the same, though he wished she didn't have to leave so soon. Her company was so refreshing to him. Just seeing her made him happy.

"Thanks for stopping by. I appreciate it." He said as he lead the way back to the door. They stood by the front door, neither one making the move to open it just yet. At last, Daisy moved her hand to grasp the doorknob, turning to look up at him before she opened it.

"I'll see you at school tomorrow?" She asked, a hopeful gleam in her brown eyes.

Steve nodded, deciding he didn't want to go another full day without seeing her... or being able to protect her from that asshole, Billy. He didn't care who said what about him or his face.

"Yeah, I'll be there. See you tomorrow."

Daisy smiled, reaching out with her free hand and taking his once again, giving it another squeeze. "See you, Steve." She spoke, finally turning the doorknob and walking out of the house. Steve closed the door behind her, unable to hold back the smile that stretched across his lips.

## 9. Chapter 9

**A/N: Hello there, readers! I apologize for the wait on this chapter, but I am very excited to share it with you all! Thank you again to everyone who has followed, favorited, and reviewed. As always, the support means so much to me. Enjoy!**

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*The pounding of running feet echoed through the dark tunnels. Daisy could feel her lungs burning – adrenaline was the only thing pushing her further. It felt like the tunnels were never-ending. She couldn't remember where they had come in from, or how much farther they had to go. She just kept her eyes on the group ahead of her, continuing to run even though she was sure her body physically couldn't take much more.*

*Suddenly she realized someone was missing. There were only three kids in front of her, not four. "Stop! Wait!" Daisy skidded to a halt, her legs feeling wobbly, like they were going to give out any second now. Everyone did as they were told, looking back at her expectantly. She saw Mike, Lucas, Max, and Steve...*

*"Where's Dustin?" She frantically asked, her words coming out breathless. How had she not realized he was gone before? When did he get separated without anyone else noticing? The rest of the group suddenly seemed to acknowledge the fact that they were down one person as well.*

*"He was just here a minute ago..." Max said, looking around, confused.*

*They all collectively froze when they heard a scream in the distance. Daisy immediately recognized the voice to be Dustin's and without a second thought she was running in the direction of the scream, ignoring the pain in her legs. She rounded a corner, a loud, horrified screech escaping her mouth at the sight before her. Dustin laid sprawled out on the ground, a demodog on top of him, pinning him there.*

*Dustin's yells for help rang in her ears, amplifying louder and louder by the second until she couldn't hear anything else but that. She felt stuck, frozen to the spot she was in. She couldn't move no matter how hard and desperately she attempted to. She couldn't help him, it was already too late. The demodog's face was wide open, its razor sharp teeth on display.*

*Daisy felt hot tears rolling down her face, feeling so helpless in that moment.*

*"Dustin!" She called out, her voice rattled by a sob.*

*Suddenly the demodog stopped, turning to face her and letting out an ear-piercing growl. The last thing she saw was the creature lunging at her.*

Daisy shot up with a gasp, looking around her dark and quiet bedroom. Her heart pounded in her chest as she took a moment to realize where she was. Her eyes finally focused in the dark as her rapid breathing slowly started to return back to its normal rhythm. It was just a dream – she was okay, everyone was okay. Small beads of sweat had formed on her forehead and she quickly reached up to wipe them away with the back of her hand.

This was the third night this week she'd had the dream. It was the same dream each time too, varying a little with who gets separated from the group, but the ending was ultimately the same every time. She thought after the first time, the dreams would stop, but they'd happened consecutively each night since then. She shook her head, trying to get the images from the nightmare out of her memory.

Turning to look at the clock on her nightstand, she sighed. It was 4:30 in the morning. With only about two more hours until she had to be up for school, she debated on not even trying to fall back asleep, afraid she would fall right back into her dream. Slowly, she lowered herself so that she was laying down on her back once again, staring up at the ceiling. She ran a shaky hand over her face.

"Get it together, Daisy." She told herself. She didn't understand why she kept having these dreams. It'd been a couple weeks since everything had happened, and everyone else seemed to be handling things fairly well. Dustin and his friends were back to their normal selves again right away and even Steve seemed to be doing fine whenever she would see him around school. She didn't know why she was having such a hard time with it.

She had dozed on and off to sleep until her alarm went off a couple hours later. Her eyelids felt heavy as she got dressed, her mouth opening wide with a yawn. She was sure that this lack of sleep the

past few nights was going to catch up with her eventually. It felt as though she was moving in slow motion, not fully aware of her movements. A knock on her bedroom door startled her out of her daze, and she called for the person knocking to come in.

Dustin poked his head in the doorway. "You almost ready? We're gonna be late." He said, slinging his backpack over his shoulders. Daisy quickly nodded her head, retrieving her own backpack from her closet. "Yeah, I'm coming. Go start the car." She instructed, tossing the keys to him, which he fumbled to catch and headed off down the hallway.

Once he was out of sight, Daisy took one last look in the mirror, sighing at the reflection staring back at her. She knew she didn't look like herself. She just looked... tired, drained, exhausted. She hoped her make-up was enough to cover the dark circles underneath her eyes. With one last glance at the clock on the nightstand, she pulled her backpack on and walked out of her bedroom.

After saying goodbye to her mother, Daisy slid into the driver's seat of the car, Dustin already waiting for her on the passenger's side. "You take longer to get ready for school now." Dustin pointed out as they pulled out of the driveway and set off down the road. "Are you trying to impress some guy at school or something?" He looked over at her expectantly, eyebrows raised.

"What? No." Daisy shook her head. She *wished* that was the case, honestly. She fell quiet for a few long moments, replaying the dream she'd had that previous night over in her head. She spared a sideways glance at Dustin, who had taken to looking out the window. Finally, she spoke up again. "Hey... how are you doing, after... you know, everything? Have you been sleeping okay?" She asked.

Dustin looked back at her, giving her an odd look, as though he didn't understand why she was randomly asking him this. "Yeah. I've been sleeping just fine." He answered with a shrug. "Why?"

Daisy shook her head again, waving a dismissive hand in the air. "I was just wondering. Making sure you were doing okay." She sent a smile in his direction before turning her gaze back to focus on the road again. She didn't really know why she had decided not to share

with him her recent nightmares. If anyone would understand, he would. But she felt a bit silly, she supposed, going to her younger brother with such issues when *she* was supposed to be the advice-giver.

"Are you?" Dustin asked her after a moment.

"Huh?" Daisy came back to reality after being lost in her own thoughts, quickly looking over towards Dustin. Again, Dustin shot her a look.

"Doing okay." He elaborated. "You're really spacey today." He added as an afterthought.

"Sorry." Daisy frowned, turning into the parking lot of the school. She pulled into an open spot, turning the engine off after putting the car in park. She looked over to Dustin fully this time, offering another smile. "I'm okay. Just tired... lots of assignments due this week." She lied, unbuckling her seat-belt and moving to get out of the car as Dustin did the same. He looked somewhat unconvinced, but let it slide anyway.

"Have a good day at school." Daisy finally said, waving as the two of them began heading toward their respective school buildings.

Lisa had intercepted her almost as soon as Daisy entered the school. The smile on the blonde's face faltered ever so slightly as she took in Daisy's appearance. "Wow, you look like hell." She blurted out. If it was anyone else who'd said it, Daisy may have been offended. But Lisa was a fairly blunt person and usually just said what was on her mind. Daisy knew she didn't make the comment with any malice; it was more so with concern.

"*Thanks.*" Daisy chuckled softly, approaching her locker and beginning to put the combination in. "I just couldn't sleep much last night." She explained, hoping that would be enough of an explanation for her friend. Luckily, it seemed that it was, since Lisa didn't question her further about it.

"Thank *goodness* Thanksgiving break is coming up." Lisa said as she leaned back against the row of lockers, looking over at Daisy. "You

can catch up on your sleep then, hopefully." She offered with a shrug. Daisy nodded her head, having nearly forgotten about Thanksgiving all together with everything else that was going on in her head as of late. But it *would* be nice, she had to admit, to have a few days off from school to get herself together.

As she closed her locker, Daisy turned around just in time to see Steve heading in her and Lisa's direction. When he spotted her, he raised his hand to wave, smiling. Daisy did the same, and Lisa followed her friend's gaze to see who she was waving at. Steve continued on past them, not wanting to interrupt their conversation, figuring he'd have a chance to see Daisy at lunch time – he'd been making it a point to sit with her most days now.

Lisa watched the interaction with a confused look on her face, turning back to Daisy once Steve was out of sight. "Since when are you and *Steve Harrington* friends?" She asked, arching an eyebrow. Daisy blushed, her eyes meeting Lisa's again as she shrugged her shoulders, attempting to act nonchalant.

"A couple weeks now, I guess. Why, what's the big deal?" She asked, adjusting the text books in her arms.

"He's only one of the most popular guys in school." Lisa responded matter-of-factly. "I mean, for a little while there he was too far wrapped around Nancy Wheeler's finger, but they're history now." She added, before leaning in with a mischievous smile on her face, as though what she was going to say next was meant to be a secret. "Rumor has it that Nancy ran off with Jonathan Byers for a romantic weekend getaway without even *telling* Steve."

Daisy did her best to act surprised at this information. Of course, she knew the truth about what really happened that weekend, but she couldn't tell Lisa that. "Now just about every girl in school is trying to get with him and mend his poor, broken heart." Lisa continued. "Personally, he's not my type. But *you* should totally go for it." She wiggled her eyebrows at Daisy.

"What? *No*– I mean, we're really just friends." Daisy's blush deepened, and Lisa gave her a knowing smile.

"*Sure.*" The blonde teased as the two of them began heading in the direction of the first class they shared. "I saw that little doe-eyed smile you gave him. Just admit it, he is nice to look at."

Daisy didn't respond, which only proved to Lisa that she was right, a satisfied grin crossing her lips. Daisy rolled her eyes at her friend, but couldn't help but smile at her at the same time. She had a feeling that Lisa wasn't going to give up on this very easily.

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Lunch time rolled around surprisingly quickly that day, which Daisy appreciated. She could feel herself nodding off in some of her classes, which was not like her. She hoped her lack of sleep wasn't going to have a negative effect on her school work. Perhaps getting some food in her system would help wake her up some more and provide her with some sort of boost of energy. She and Lisa found an empty table in the cafeteria, and Daisy picked at her food while Lisa went on about some guy in her Chemistry class that had been flirting with her.

Daisy was only half-listening when Steve approached the table, tray in hand as he peered down at the two girls. "Mind if I join you two?" He asked.

"Of *course* not." Lisa answered before Daisy had a chance to. As Steve set his tray down on the table and proceeded to take a seat, Lisa gave another knowing smile to Daisy. Then, she made a move to grab her things, standing up from the table, earning a confused look from Daisy.

"You know what, I totally forgot to take down the Chemistry homework. And there's Adam over there—" Lisa said, referring to the boy she had just been talking about before Steve arrived. "I'm gonna go ask him for it." She added, sending one last, subtle smile in Daisy's direction before disappearing off in the sea of students who were in the cafeteria.

Daisy shook her head with a laugh before looking over to Steve. For a second, she wondered if what Lisa had said that morning was true. Was every girl in school looking to get with Steve now that news had spread that he and Nancy were over? Was he *entertaining* the idea of



having all these girls falling all over him? She didn't know why that thought bothered her a little bit...

"Hey." Steve greeted, pulling her out of her thoughts as she blinked, before offering him a small smile. They'd certainly gotten closer over the last couple of weeks, and Daisy found that spending time with him just felt so natural to her. She didn't know him as "King Steve" like the rest of the school liked to refer to him as. The Steve she knew was kind and funny, and easy to talk to.

"Hey," She responded, her smile growing a bit. "How's your day been?"

Steve gave a shrug, pushing some of the food around on the tray. "Alright," He answered, his eyes meeting her's, showing some concern. "You look like you could use a nap. Or two."

Daisy frowned. Was it *really* that noticeable to other people how off she felt today? She thought she had been doing a better job at hiding it, but apparently that wasn't the case. She ripped a piece of bread from her sandwich and tossed it across the table at Steve, laughing as it hit his chest. "You sure know how to make a girl feel good about herself, Harrington." She spoke with playful sarcasm.

Steve laughed as well, grabbing the piece of bread and flinging it back in her direction. "Sorry." He smiled sheepishly.

"It's okay." Daisy returned the smile, shaking her head. She had thought about telling Steve about how she'd been having trouble sleeping lately due to her bad dreams, but decided against it for now. There were too many people around that could possibly overhear and she didn't feel like letting anyone else in on what was going on. Especially concerning what the dreams were *about*.

"Got any fun plans for Thanksgiving?" She asked, deciding the change the subject before he had the chance to question her more about her tired demeanor. Again, Steve shrugged, going back to playing with his food.

"My dad got called on a last minute business trip and I'm pretty sure my mom is going with him. They won't be back until Friday, so it

looks like I'm on my own for this year." He told her, and she could tell that he was trying to hide the fact that this information upset him. Daisy bit down gently on her bottom lip for a moment, not even having to contemplate before she spoke up again. "You're more than welcome to come over and have dinner with us. It'll just be Dustin, our mom, and I – all of our extended family lives out of state. And I know they'd be happy to have you over. You should come."

Steve was unable to mask the grateful expression on his features. He had truthfully been dreading the upcoming holiday since he and Nancy had broken up. Normally he would have just went to the Wheeler's house, but now that that was out of the question, he had thought he'd have to spend his Thanksgiving by himself.

"Yeah, definitely." He finally spoke up again, nodding his head. "That'd be great. Thanks, Daisy."

Daisy smiled over at him again. "Of course. No one should have to be alone for the holidays."

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Thanksgiving Day had approached a lot faster than Daisy had anticipated. Although she was grateful for the chance to sleep in on the day off from school, she still found herself struggling to do so. Another bad dream had kept her from being able to sleep much. She knew eventually she was going to have to tell *someone* about them. Keeping everything bottled up inside was only going to end badly.

If there was one thing her mother took very seriously, it was cooking big holiday meals. She was up at the crack of dawn to start preparing the food, and even though it was typically just the three of them, she always went out of her way to make it special. Daisy could hear her rummaging around in the kitchen from her bedroom, and she slowly got up out of her bed, realizing that she wasn't going to get any more sleep at this point.

She made her way into the kitchen, hearing her mother humming to herself as she chopped some vegetables. When she saw Daisy come into the room, she smiled at her daughter. "Morning, honey. You're up early on your day off." She pointed out, her attention turning back to the carrots she was cutting into slices. Daisy moved over to one of

the cabinets, pulling out a glass and then filling it with water from the sink.

"Just had some trouble sleeping." Daisy told her before taking a sip from the glass of water. "Oh—I forgot to tell you, but I invited a friend of mine over for dinner. I hope that's okay."

Her mother smiled a bit wider. "Of course it's okay, sweetie. The more the merrier." She said.

Daisy smiled back, placing her glass in the sink and heading over towards the bathroom. She took a long, hot shower, allowing the water to run over her face and hair as she closed her eyes. Taking a deep breath in, she rubbed her hands over her face. She still didn't feel very much like herself. It was truthfully all very draining, and she didn't know how much longer this phase was going to last.

The rest of the morning went by fairly smooth. Daisy helped her mother set the table and with some of the cooking, while Dustin lounged on the couch, flipping through the channels on the television. It was a little past noon time when there was a knock at the front door. Dustin got up from the couch to go answer it, confusion washing over him at the sight of Steve standing on the other side of the threshold.

"Steve? What are you doing here?" The younger boy asked, not necessarily unhappy that he was there, just unsure as to why.

"Oh—uh, Daisy invited me, actually." Steve responded, figuring that Daisy either forgot to mention it to Dustin that he was coming, or for some reason just didn't tell him at all. A look of realization came over Dustin as a small smile crept upon his lips, before he stepped aside to allow Steve to come in.

"Daisy, Steve's here!" Dustin called into the kitchen to let his sister know that her guest had arrived. Daisy's mother looked over at her with her eyebrows raised in surprise. "Steve? You didn't tell me this was a *boyfriend*." She sent a grin in her daughter's direction.

Daisy could feel her cheeks redden as she placed down the knife she had been using to cut some more vegetables with. "Mom—he's *really*

just a friend. Please don't make this a big deal." She nearly begged, her tone hushed so that Steve wouldn't overhear from the living room. The last thing she wanted was to be completely embarrassed by her mother thinking that she and Steve were a couple.

She stepped around the counter and walked into the living room, greeting Steve with a smile. He had taken a moment to look around the house. While it was considerably smaller than his, and a bit more cluttered, it actually *felt* like a home. There were photos of Daisy and Dustin as children all along the mantel, knick-knacks scattered around on shelves. It was cozy and warm inside, and the smell of the food coming from the kitchen made it seem even more homey.

"Hey, you made it." Daisy approached, pulling his attention over to her, as she smiled up at him.

"Wouldn't miss it." He smiled back at her, taking a moment to appreciate how nice it felt just to be there. His own home was feeling quite lonely as of late.

Daisy heard her mother calling for some assistance from the kitchen, and she looked back at Steve apologetically. "I'll just be a few more minutes. Just... make yourself at home." She said, motioning to the couch where Dustin had sat back down.

"You want help with anything?" Steve asked, but Daisy quickly shook her head.

"No, it's okay, really. You're a guest." She offered another smile. "Thank you though."

As Daisy headed back into the kitchen, Steve took a seat on the couch beside Dustin. Dustin glanced over at Steve, almost studying him for a few moments as silence fell over the two of them. Finally breaking the silence, Dustin spoke up. "So, you and my sister are like, *friends* now or something?" He asked curiously.

Steve paused for a second, eyebrows furrowing together before he chuckled softly. He wondered briefly if this was Dustin being a protective younger brother. "Uh—yeah, I'd say we are. She's pretty cool." He answered, seeing Dustin nod his head in agreement.

"Does this mean you'll be coming over here a lot more now?" Dustin continued his questioning.

Again, Steve hesitated. This was the first time he'd even been over their house (aside from when they were trying to catch Dart in the storm cellar) and it was somewhat of a special occasion. He certainly wouldn't mind coming over more often, if Daisy was okay with that. Plus, he had to admit that Dustin had grown on him since their endeavors together and he wouldn't be opposed to spending more time with the kid.

"Maybe?" Steve looked over at Dustin and shrugged his shoulders, not really sure he had a solid answer for the boy's question.

It took a moment, Dustin seemingly contemplating, before he finally nodded his head again and smiled. "Cool. Hey, wanna check out my science project I'm working on for school? It's pretty awesome."

"Sure thing." Steve answered as the two of them got up from the couch and he followed Dustin down the hallway to his bedroom.

It wasn't long before the dinner was prepared and ready to eat. Daisy had found the boys in Dustin's room, Dustin showing Steve all of his science related books and gadgets. She couldn't help but smile as she watched from the doorway, neither of them noticing her standing there until she spoke up and let them know that dinner was ready.

They all sat around the table in the dining room, plates filled with delicious turkey and all the fixings. Dustin talked about the upcoming Snow Ball dance at school, while Daisy's mother bombarded Steve with questions about how they had met or how long they'd been friends for. Daisy knew her mother wouldn't have been able to resist embarrassing her, even if she didn't realize she was doing so. But Steve answered her questions gracefully, earning laughs and smiles from the older woman.

After dinner, Daisy, Steve, and Dustin retreated to the couch where they watched whatever movie was playing on the television while Mrs. Henderson cleaned up the kitchen. It was starting to get dark outside when Steve reluctantly peered over at Daisy. "I should probably get going. It's getting late." He said over the volume of the

television.

Daisy nodded, hiding her disappointment that he had to leave. Things had gone so surprisingly well and she had enjoyed his company. It wasn't weird, or forced, or awkward. It was actually nice spending time with him outside of their normal school routine.

"I'll walk you out." She said, slowly rising from her spot on the couch as Steve did the same. He said goodbye to Dustin, who was half-asleep on the couch before following Daisy over towards the door, but not without quickly poking his head into the kitchen and waving to her mother.

"Thanks for the dinner, Mrs. Henderson. It was great." He smiled.

The older woman smiled back at him, placing the last dish on the drying rack. "Oh *please*, sweetie, call me Claudia. I hope to see you around more often."

Steve nodded, sending one last smile in her direction before following Daisy out the front door. They headed down the front steps off the porch and over to where Steve's car was parked in the driveway. They came to a halt once they reached the driver's side door.

"Thanks for coming." Daisy said, smiling up at him.

Steve shook his head. "Thanks for having me. It was nice. This was one of the better Thanksgiving's I've had in a while."

"I'm glad to hear that." Daisy responded. Without thinking too much of it, she leaned in, wrapping her arms around him in a hug. Steve was a bit surprised at the sudden gesture but didn't waste a moment pulling her in a bit closer as he wrapped his arms around her.

Daisy probably could have stayed just like that for a while, relishing in how warm he felt against her. It was calming, like she had completely forgotten about everything that had been troubling her lately. Hesitantly, she pulled away after a few moments, looking up at him again.

"Happy Thanksgiving, Steve." She said quietly.

"Happy Thanksgiving." Steve responded, reaching out to grab the door handle on his car. "I'll see you Monday?"

Daisy nodded her head. "Of course."

She headed back up the front steps as Steve got in his car, turning once she got to the door and waving at him. Steve made sure she got back inside the house okay before he pulled out of the driveway, unable to contain the smile that crossed his lips the entire drive home.

## 10. Chapter 10

A/N: Wow okay, all I can say is I'm SO sorry to have left this story hanging! Real life kind of got in the way and I lost a little motivation to write, BUT, I'm back! Thank you so much to those who sent encouraging reviews to continue with this story. I still have so many ideas in store for it, I just have to find the time to actually sit down and write. Anyway, after a long wait (again, I'm very sorry!) here is chapter 10! Enjoy!

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The weather was gradually becoming colder, days were getting shorter, and snow flurries were beginning to grace the skies of Hawkins. The fast approaching holiday season usually put Daisy in good spirits. She loved everything about Christmas-the music, the lights, buying gifts for those close to her. But this year just seemed... wrong. After everything that had happened, she still felt as though she hadn't fully recovered. Sure, her nightmares had become less frequent, but she still had them every now and again. It was only up until recently that she had started sleeping through the nights fully again.

There was almost this constant fear that things wouldn't stay normal for long. She kept expecting those creatures to come back, to finish what they had started. But she had to keep reminding herself that El *had* closed the gate. It *was* all over. She just couldn't shake the feeling that maybe-just maybe-it could happen all over again.

It was the night of Hawkins Middle School's annual Snow Ball dance, something that Dustin had been talking about for weeks now. He had this new found confidence that Daisy could only assume came from him becoming so close with Steve as of recently. She did have to admit that it warmed her heart to see how much Dustin looked up to Steve-and how cool Steve was with a thirteen-year-old hanging around him constantly. She realized Dustin was getting to an age where he was going to stop coming to her about things; he would want a male figure to confide in, and she understood that. Besides, she didn't think she would be the best equipped to have "the talk" with Dustin... when the time was right, of course.



Daisy stood in the kitchen, cleaning a few dirty dishes that were left in the sink as Dustin frantically ran around the house looking for something. "Shit!" He cursed, to which Daisy darted a look in his direction, eyebrows narrowed.

"What are you looking for?" She asked, setting a dish down on the drying rack.

"Just... a bag I got from the store." Dustin answered, confusing Daisy as to why he couldn't be more specific about *what* was in the bag he was looking for.

"Found it!" He exclaimed quickly, snatching the brown paper bag off the kitchen counter and rushing back into his bedroom with it. Daisy opened her mouth to say something but stopped short, just shaking her head instead.

A few moments later, there was a knock at the front door. Daisy's mother called out to Dustin that his ride was here, though she made no move to get up from her spot on the couch to answer the door.

Daisy huffed quietly, setting the last clean dish down and making her way over to the door, pulling it open. She was surprised to see Steve standing on the opposite side of the threshold, but quickly realized that he must have been the one giving Dustin a ride. She had just figured it'd be Johnathan since he typically gave all the boys rides places when Will was going.

"Hey." She smiled, taking a step back and motioning for Steve to come inside. "You're Dustin's ride?"

"Yeah, I told him I'd drop him off and get him after. Hope that's okay." He responded as he stepped inside and closed the door behind him.

Daisy nodded her head. "Oh yeah, totally okay." She smiled once again. She turned to look down the hallway towards Dustin's room, where the door was still shut and there was no sign of him. Brows furrowed in confusion, she called out to him. "Dustin! Steve's here, hurry up!"

Dustin emerged sheepishly from his bedroom, cheeks flushing as Daisy let out a small gasp. His curly hair was slicked back in a way Daisy had never seen him wear it before. Her look of surprise quickly turned into a smile as she placed a hand over her heart. "Dustin, you look adorable!" She gushed.

"*Adorable?* No! This is not meant to be adorable, Daisy, it's meant to be... you know, *cool*." Dustin exclaimed, becoming visibly flustered as he reached a hand up to touch his hair. Daisy frowned, about to correct herself before Steve spoke up.

"I think what she means is, you look *slick*, dude." Steve said, giving a thumbs up and an encouraging look to agree with him in Daisy's direction. Daisy quickly caught on and nodded her head, glancing back over at Dustin. "Exactly. You look great, buddy."

Dustin relaxed a bit, a grin now growing on his face. "Well, we don't want to be late. Let's get a move on, Steve." He said, fixing his suit coat before heading towards the door.

"Be safe!" Daisy called out to him. "And have fun!"

"I'll have him home by 10." Steve chuckled, following Dustin towards the door and giving one last smile in Daisy's direction.

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Steve and Dustin sat in his car in the parking lot of the school as Steve gave one of his best pep talks to the younger boy. He truly had developed a soft spot for Dustin as of late. Sure, maybe it was a bit weird, him being so close with a thirteen-year-old but Dustin was pretty cool, he had to admit. Plus-and he wouldn't outright admit it-but hanging around Dustin meant that he got to see Daisy more often, and he certainly wasn't complaining about that.

"Alright, now go get 'em," Steve said, nodding his head in the direction of the school, where the dance was currently in full swing. "And try not to break too many hearts tonight, okay? You got plenty of time for that." He added with a small smirk.

Dustin took a deep breath, before finally moving to get out of the car. "Thanks, Steve. I'll see you later."

"See you." Steve responded, watching as the younger boy got out of the car and headed towards the school. He watched with a proud smile, until he caught a glimpse of Nancy inside, serving punch to the kids. His smile faltered a bit as he took a moment to watch her. He could see her keep glancing in another direction with a subtle smile and he could only assume she was looking at Johnathan, who was also there working as a photographer.

It was crazy to him, really, to think that just months ago he was head over heels in love with Nancy. She was his everything. And just like that, it was all over. He should have seen it coming. The signs were all over the place, but he figured he was so clouded by his feelings for her that he refused to see it any other way. Maybe that's why it hurt so badly when she revealed that she didn't love him the way he had once loved her.

But now as he looked at Nancy, still so elegant and poised, he felt... content. Not heart broken, not sad, not like he needed to get her back. He knew she had moved on-and maybe he finally had too. It was strange not to feel like a heavy weight was resting on his chest every time he looked at her, and he liked it. It was almost liberating.

Suddenly, a thought popped into his head. What was he still doing sitting here? A smile graced his lips as he put the car in drive and pulled out of the parking lot, heading back in the same direction he had just come from.

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Daisy sat curled up on the couch, stifling a yawn as she flipped through the channels on the television. Her mother had retired to her bedroom for the night, and Daisy was enjoying some quiet relaxation time. She figured she'd stay up until Dustin got home to see how his night went. However, a knock on the door jolted her out of her thoughts. She jumped slightly, not expecting anyone to be coming over at this time of night. She stood from her spot on the couch, heading over to the door and slowly pulling it open. For the second time that night, she was surprised to see Steve standing there.

"Hey. You wanna grab a burger or something? I'm starving." He looked almost nervous as he spoke, and Daisy wasn't quite sure why. He was the king of cool, wasn't he?

When she took a moment to respond, Steve could feel himself growing more anxious. Was he overstepping? Did she not want to hang out with him outside of school? But when she smiled at him, he felt himself relax a bit, his stomach fluttering at the sight.

"Yeah, I'd love to." She said finally. "Let me just put on some shoes and grab my purse."

Steve let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding in as she walked away for a moment to gather her things. She reappeared a few seconds later, and he stepped aside to let her walk out the door.

The ride to Benny's Diner was quiet for the most part, aside from the music coming from the radio. It was a comfortable quiet, though. Steve didn't know why he was feeling so nervous. He saw Daisy every day at school, he'd been to her house quite a few times as of recently (though most of those times were to pick up or drop off Dustin.) Plus, he'd been on *many* dates before, and he never felt like this.

But... was this even considered a date? Or was it just two friends grabbing a bite to eat together? Would Daisy have even said yes if she *realized* it might be a date? Questions continued to fill his mind as he drove, but he had to keep reminding himself to play it cool.

It was only a few minute drive to get to the diner. Steve wanted desperately to hold Daisy's hand as they walked beside each other towards the entrance, but he held back. The last thing he wanted to do was come on too strong and scare her off.

A waitress showed them to their table, and Daisy smiled softly at Steve from her spot across from him. "Thanks for driving Dustin to the dance. He really likes spending time with you." She said.

Steve shook his head, waving his hand dismissively. "No problem. He's a cool kid, I like spending time with him too."

The waitress returned a few moments later to take their order. The diner was fairly empty that night, only a couple other tables occupied other than their own. When the waitress finished jotting down their order on her notepad, she sauntered away. Steve glanced back at Daisy, his hand coming up to play with the straw in his drink.

"It's pretty awesome how close you and Dustin are. Sometimes I wish I wasn't an only child. It gets kinda lonely, you know?" He said with a small shrug. Daisy nodded her head.

"Yeah, he's definitely a lot of work, but I love him." She chuckled to herself. "I think he thinks of you like an older brother. I'm glad he's got you to go to for things. I try, but he's getting to the age where I don't really think he wants girl advice from his sister. He needs a good male role model in his life."

Steve couldn't help but smile at her words. But they also brought forth a question in his mind. He'd met their mother on multiple occasions now but never their father. He wasn't sure if he was even in the picture... or if it would be okay to ask about it. But Daisy was pretty easy going, not much seemed to bother her.

"Yeah, totally. I kind of just took him under my wing." He laughed a bit. "Your father... I never hear you guys talk about him. Is he in the picture at all?"

Daisy looked down at the table a moment, nibbling softly on her bottom lip. Steve immediately regretted asking the question, seeing just how uncomfortable she seemed. But finally, she shrugged, her gaze returning to Steve's.

"He split years ago, when Dustin was really young. And even before that he was never around much." She answered quietly, pushing a strand of hair behind her ear. "It's tough, you know, because sometimes I feel like I need to be a parent to Dustin instead of a sister. He was too young to really remember what happened, but he'll still ask about him sometimes."

"What about you? You ever tried reaching out?" Steve asked.

Daisy quickly shook her head. "No. There's no need for me to. He made it clear that he didn't want either of us, so why should I bother, you know?"

Steve could tell the subject was upsetting her a bit, but at the same time he appreciated the fact that she was opening up to him about it.

"I understand that." He said after a moment. "For what it's worth, I think you're doing a great job as an older sister. That kid adores you, he never shuts up about you half the time." He added with a small laugh. Not like he minded hearing about Daisy almost every time he saw Dustin.

"Well that makes me happy." She smiled.

Steve was about to respond, but the waitress interrupted as she placed their burgers down in front of them. The rest of their meal was spent with small talk about school, their friends, the upcoming holidays, and things of the like.

Daisy actually felt good about opening up to Steve. He was so easy to talk to and she could tell he genuinely cared to hear what she had to say. She giggled as she watched him talk unknowingly with a glob of ketchup at the corner of his lip, and his cheeks flushed as she reached over to wipe it away with a napkin. It was the first time in a while that Daisy truly felt at ease. It was the first time that she wasn't thinking about everything that had happened in the back of her mind. Steve had a way of making her feel like she had nothing to worry about... and she liked that.

When the bill came, Steve immediately pulled out his wallet much to Daisy's protests. "I can pay my half, really." She insisted, holding out a few bills. Steve only shook his head, placing down enough cash to cover the entire bill.

"It's fine, I promise." He assured her. Daisy reluctantly placed her money back in her purse, but not before giving him somewhat of a stern look. "*Fine*. But I'll get next time."

"Deal." Steve grinned.

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Daisy couldn't stop her laughter on the drive home as Steve jokingly sang along to the songs on the radio. He would hit the high notes so over-dramatically that she had to cover her ears.

As they pulled back into the driveway of her house, her laughter began to dissipate. "All I'm gonna say is, I don't think you should go

into a career in music." She teased.

"*What?* I'm a great singer, come on now." He joked, turning the volume on the radio down after putting the car in park. The silence took over for a few moments as neither one made a move to get out of the car. There was still about an hour left of the dance that Dustin was at but he could tell Daisy was getting tired so he decided to drop her off before going back to get Dustin.

"Thanks again for dinner," Daisy spoke up, offering another small smile.

"Thanks for coming with me." Steve responded. He took a second to look at her and reflect on how fast his feelings had grown for her in the past few months. He wanted so badly to lean in and kiss her right then and there. In fact, he had to stop himself from doing so. He didn't want to move too fast-didn't want to make the same mistake that he did with Nancy and rush into things.

Daisy had butterflies in her stomach as she felt Steve's gaze on her. She didn't want to get out of the car. She didn't want the night to end so soon, and she wasn't exactly sure *why* he wasn't making a move. If this were a typical date, he would have kissed her by now. But he didn't. Maybe she had completely misread things. Maybe he only thought of her as a friend.

When it was clear that nothing more was going to happen, Daisy cleared her throat, moving her hand towards the door handle.

"I'll see you soon?" She asked, hoping her voice didn't sound too hopeful.

"Absolutely. And I'll have Dustin home soon." Steve said, smiling again in her direction.

"Okay, thanks." Daisy said as she opened the car door, beginning to step out.

Once she was completely out of the car, Steve spoke up before she had the chance to close the door. "Daisy-"

She leaned down, poking her head back into the car. Was this it? Was

he finally going to kiss her?

"Have a good night." Was all he said. Daisy felt her hopes deflate like a balloon, but she forced a smile in hopes that he didn't notice.

"You too, Steve. I'll see you around." She returned the smile, finally closing the car door behind her and heading back up towards the house.